ROSE™

MEREDITH FINCH
IG GUARA

VOLUME THREE:
THE LAST LIGHT

ROSE

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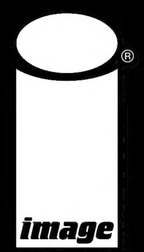

ROSE, VOL. 3: THE LAST LIGHT.
First printing. April 2019.
Published by Image Comics, Inc. Office of publication: 2701 NW Vaughn St., Suite 780, Portland, OR 97210. Copyright © 2019 Meredith Finch. All rights reserved.
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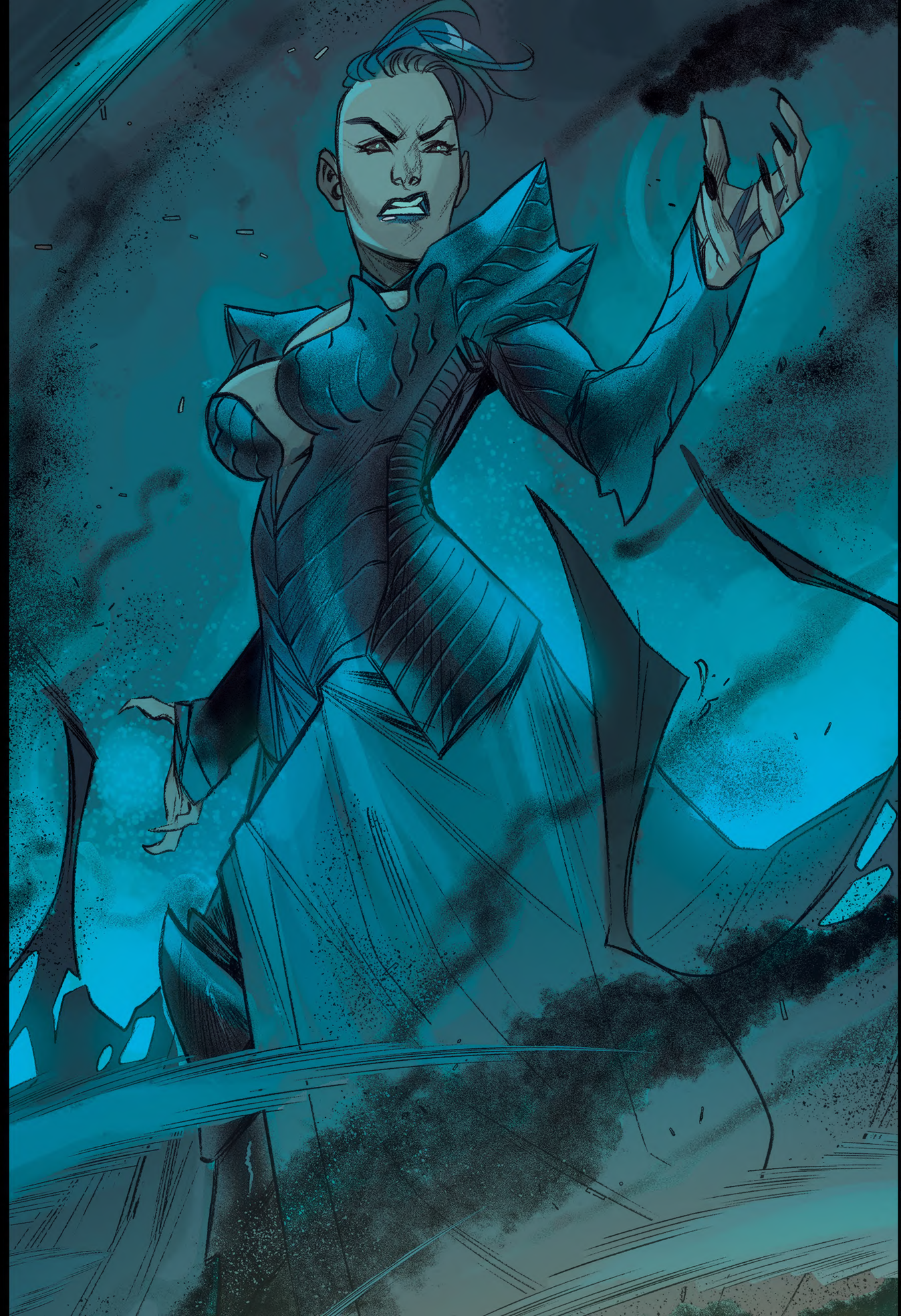

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THIRTEEN

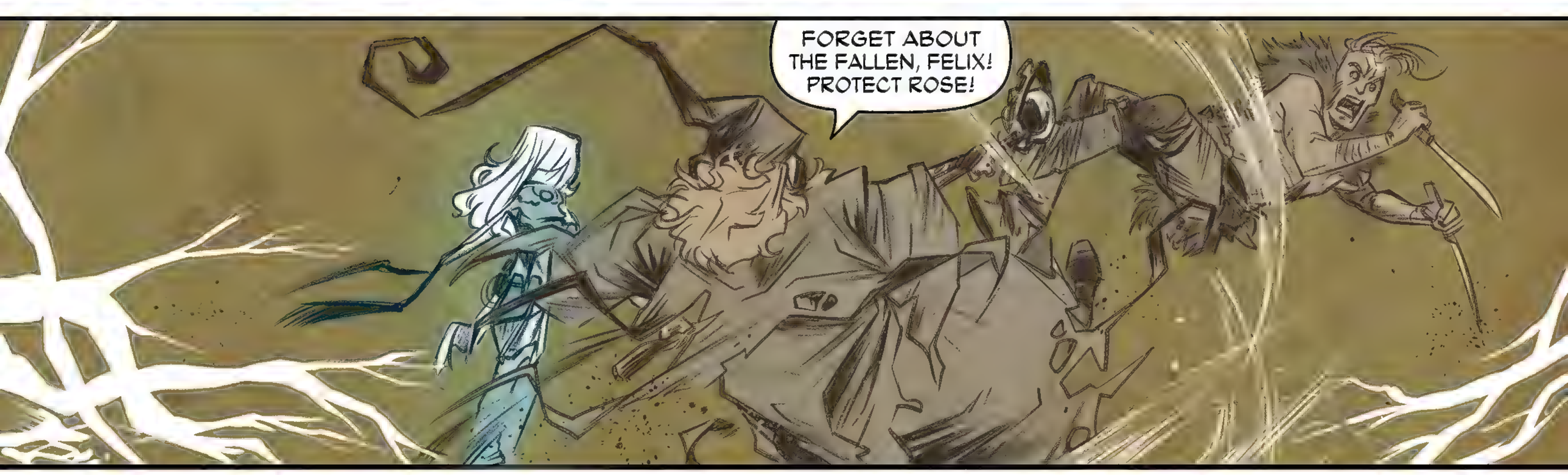
ROSE, WHAT ARE YOU...?!
GET BEHIND ME!
HRRGGUHHH!
SNRROAWWW!
ANYONE ELSE UP FOR A LIL' GAME OF KILL-THE-KITTY?
IT IS ABOUT TIME YOU BOYS SHOWED UP.
GOOD TO SEE YOU TOO, ILA.
RRRRRRRR

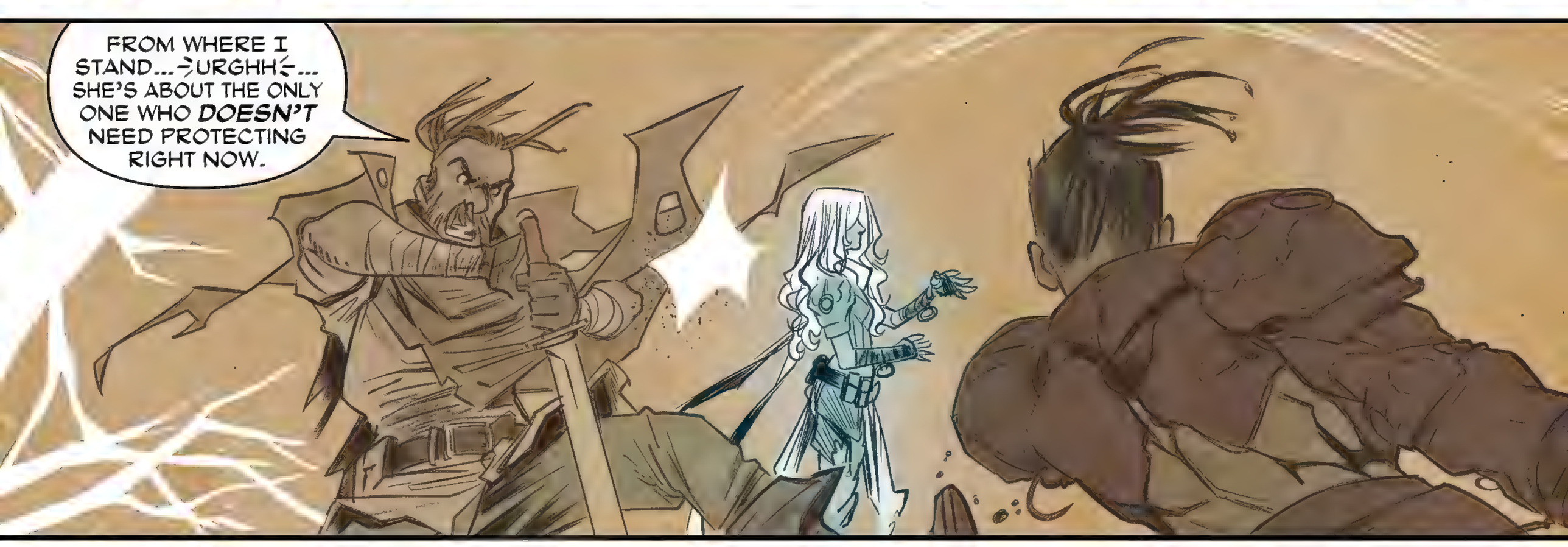
GUARDIAN!
YOU SAVED THE KNIGHT FROM THE BRINK OF DEATH ONCE, BUT YOU KNOW YOU ARE NOT YET POWERFUL ENOUGH TO SAVE THEM ALL.
YOU MUST MAKE A CHOICE...COME WITH US OR WATCH, HELPLESS, AS YOUR COMPANIONS DIE ONE BY ONE!
I...I...
ROSE! DO NOT LET THEM USE YOUR FEARS AGAINST YOU.
COME WITH US, GUARDIAN. TO SAVE YOUR FRIENDS, YOU NEED ONLY JOIN THORNE.
THORNE...
IGNORE THEM, ROSE! DO NOT ALLOW THEIR LIES TO TAKE ROOT IN YOUR HEART!
...WHY CAN'T I FEEL HIM ANYMORE?

HEAR US, ROSE.
YOU ARE A GUARDIAN. YOU ARE ONE OF US. ONLY WE CAN HELP YOU BE WHAT YOU WERE MEANT TO BE.
GUARDIANS BELONG TOGETHER. WE CAN GIVE YOU WHAT YOU NEED.
...WE BELONG TOGETHER.
ROSE! NO!
...WE BELONG TOGETHER...
LIKE HELL YOU DO!

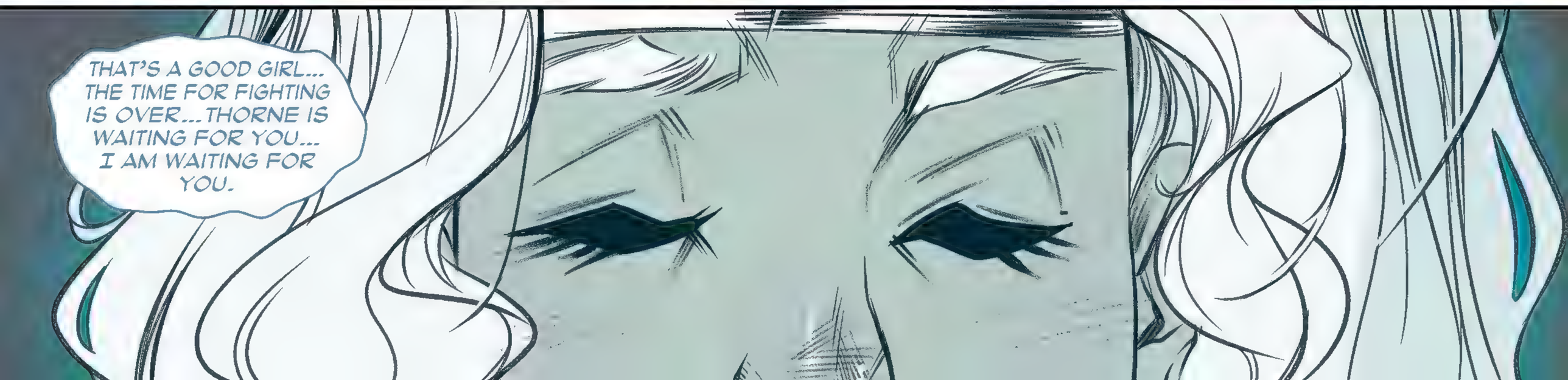
THE GIRL GOES WITH YOU OVER MY DEAD BODY.
THAT WAS ALWAYS THE PLAN, TRAITOR!
ANY TIPS ON HOW TA KILL SOMETHIN' THAT'S ALREADY DEAD...OR WHATEVER IT IS THESE THINGS ARE?
THUNK
RRAWOWWW!
N...N... NICE KITTY!
RRRRRRRRRR
JUST KEEP SWINGING!
BUT MY FRIENDS... THERE'S TOO MANY, I CAN'T...

IT'S TIME FOR MY SISTER'S CORRUPTION... *YOUR* CORRUPTION TO END!

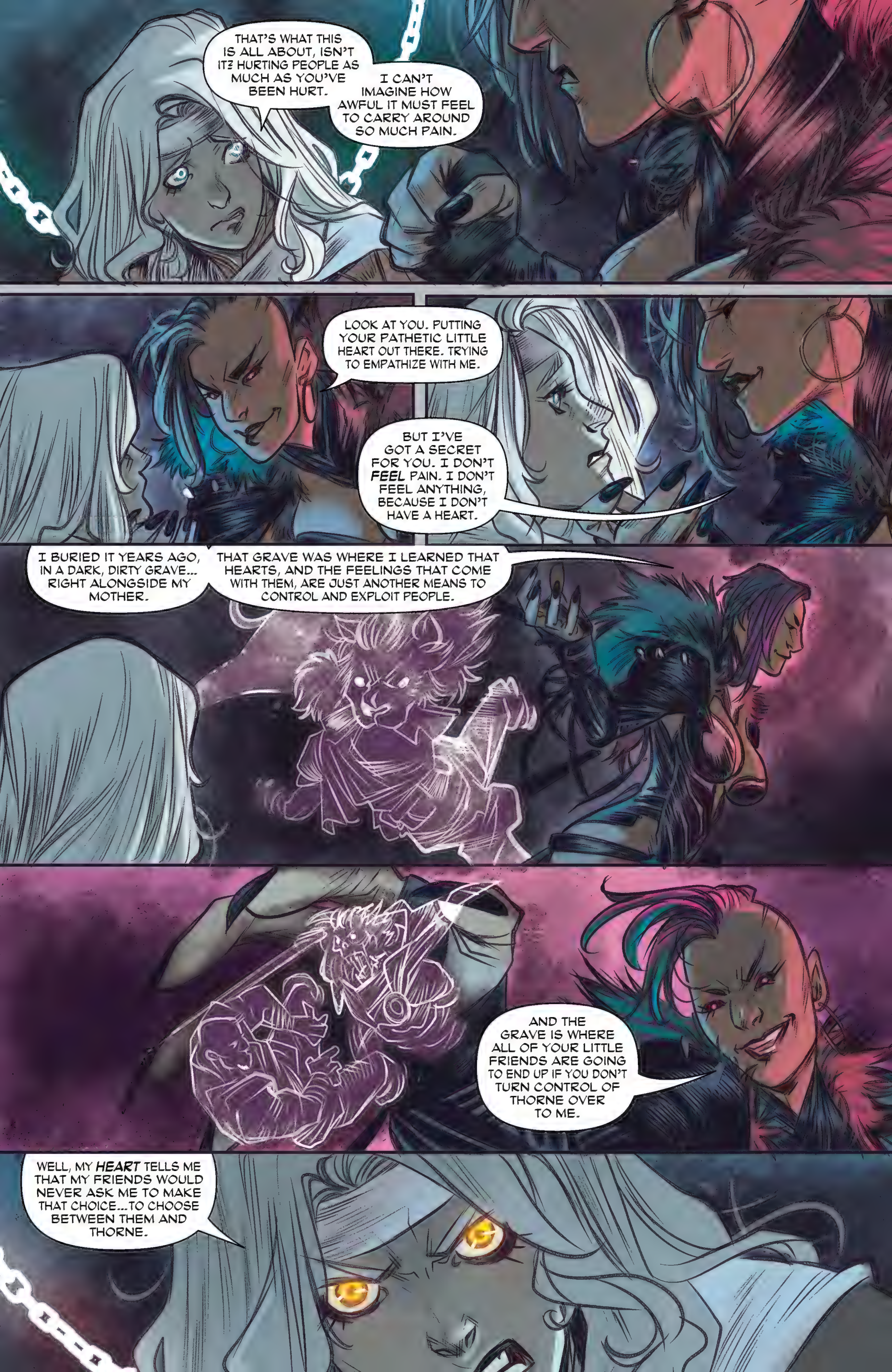

FORGET ABOUT THE FALLEN, FELIX! PROTECT ROSE!


FROM WHERE I STAND...URGHH...SHE'S ABOUT THE ONLY ONE WHO *DOESN'T* NEED PROTECTING RIGHT NOW.

AEEIIIHHH!
RRRROOOSSEEE.

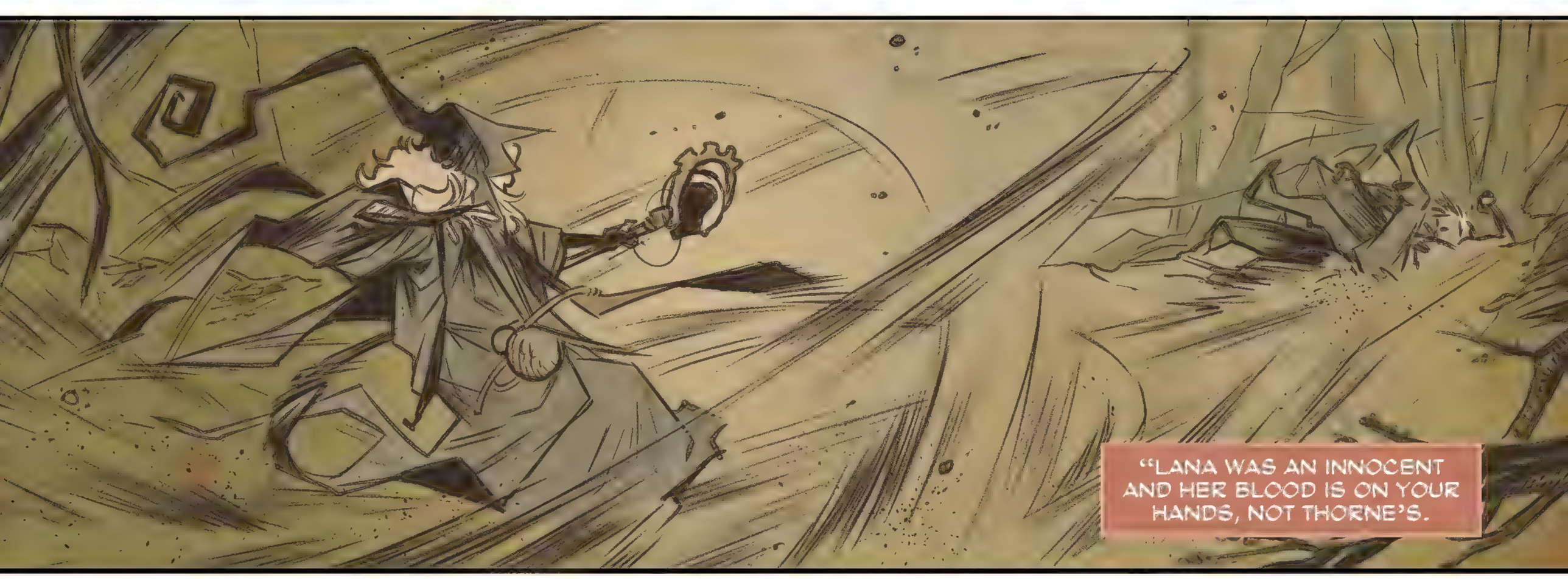

THAT'S A GOOD GIRL... THE TIME FOR FIGHTING IS OVER...THORNE IS WAITING FOR YOU... I AM WAITING FOR YOU.

DRUCILLA.
SO, YOU'RE ROSE. I HAVE TO CONFESS...I'M A BIT DISAPPOINTED. I EXPECTED...I DON'T KNOW...MORE.
A KHAT AS POWERFUL AS THORNE DESERVES TO BE PAIRED WITH SOMEONE EQUALLY POWERFUL.
YOU'RE SO WEAK...POSITIVELY PUNY, REALLY. WHAT IS IT ABOUT YOU? WHY WERE YOU CHOSEN? WHY ARE YOU GUARDIAN TO THE LAST OF TTEREVE'S KHATZ WHEN I CAN SLIP IN AND OUT OF YOUR MIND SO EASILY?
PLEASE... JUST...LET THORNE GO.
OH NO, NO, NO, NO, NO. YOU CAN'T START BEGGING YET...
I HAVEN'T EVEN BEGUN TO HURT YOU.


THAT'S WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT, ISN'T IT? HURTING PEOPLE AS MUCH AS YOU'VE BEEN HURT.
I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW AWFUL IT MUST FEEL TO CARRY AROUND SO MUCH PAIN.
LOOK AT YOU. PUTTING YOUR PATHETIC LITTLE HEART OUT THERE. TRYING TO EMPATHIZE WITH ME.
BUT I'VE GOT A SECRET FOR YOU. I DON'T FEEL PAIN. I DON'T FEEL ANYTHING, BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE A HEART.
I BURIED IT YEARS AGO, IN A DARK, DIRTY GRAVE... RIGHT ALONGSIDE MY MOTHER.
THAT GRAVE WAS WHERE I LEARNED THAT HEARTS, AND THE FEELINGS THAT COME WITH THEM, ARE JUST ANOTHER MEANS TO CONTROL AND EXPLOIT PEOPLE.
AND THE GRAVE IS WHERE ALL OF YOUR LITTLE FRIENDS ARE GOING TO END UP IF YOU DON'T TURN CONTROL OF THORNE OVER TO ME.
WELL, MY HEART TELLS ME THAT MY FRIENDS WOULD NEVER ASK ME TO MAKE THAT CHOICE...TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THEM AND THORNE.

"YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT. NOBLE FOOLS TEND TO STICK TOGETHER.
"IT'S WHAT MAKES YOU ALL SUCH EASY TARGETS.
"BUT THEN AGAIN, THORNE IS ALREADY A KILLER...
"...PERHAPS IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT HIS GUARDIAN BECOMES ONE, TOO."

"YOUR LIES BETRAY YOU, DRUCILLA.


"LANA WAS AN INNOCENT AND HER BLOOD IS ON YOUR HANDS, NOT THORNE'S.

"MY FRIENDS, ALL OF US, WE KNOW WHAT WE'RE RISKING."

AND EVERY ONE OF US BELIEVES THAT DEFEATING YOU IS WORTH THE SACRIFICE.
THORNE... MY FRIENDS. THE BONDS WE SHARE ARE ONES OF LOVE.

IT'S WHY YOU WILL NEVER POSSESS THORNE, AND ULTIMATELY WHY WE WILL DEFEAT YOU.
YOU THINK LOVE MAKES YOU WEAK. YOU'RE WRONG. IT GIVES US STRENGTH.
"IT GIVES US STRENGTH." YOU. PATHETIC. LITTLE. FOOL. LOVE JUST MAKES YOU EXPLOITABLE.
YOUR VILLAGE WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING.
I WILL TAKE EVERYONE YOU HAVE EVER CARED ABOUT...
...ONE BY ONE, UNTIL YOU GIVE ME WHAT I WANT.

BECAUSE NOW I'VE SEEN YOUR THOUGHTS. NOW, I KNOW YOUR WEAKNESS.
YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, DO YOU? I CARE ABOUT EVERY SINGLE PERSON YOU HAVE MANIPULATED AND HURT WITH YOUR SELFISHNESS AND LIES.

I'M COMING FOR THORNE, DRUCILLA. AND THERE IS NO POWER ON THIS EARTH STRONG ENOUGH TO STOP ME.

COME THEN. YOU CAN WITNESS FIRSTHAND THE TRANSFORMATION OF YOUR PRECIOUS KHAT FROM LOYAL FRIEND TO OBEDIENT SLAVE.

I KNOW YOUR WEAKNESS NOW TOO, DRUCILLA. AND YOUR DAYS OF USING FEAR AS YOUR WEAPON ARE ABOUT TO END.

AND SO IS THIS FIGHT.
GASP
THE MASTER IS READY FOR YOU NOW.

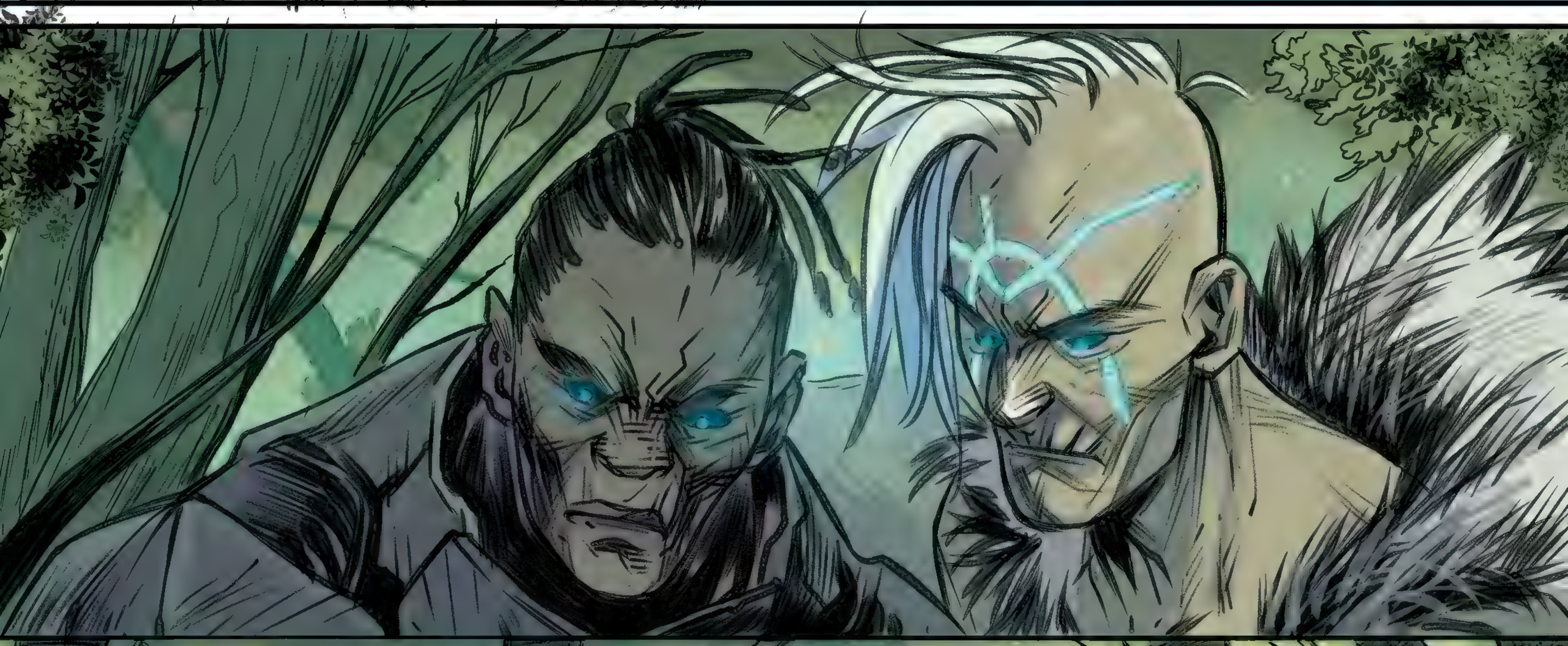
ROSE!
NOOOOOO!

WHAT IS THAT *THING*? WHERE IS IT TAKING ROSE?!
TELL ME WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ROSE!
WE ARE GUARDIANS. YOU *KNOW* WE WILL ALWAYS WIN AND THAT YOU ARE POWERLESS TO STOP US.
THE GIRL IS BEYOND YOUR REACH NOW, KNIGHT.
THE NEXT TIME YOU SEE YOUR PRECIOUS GUARDIAN YOU'LL BE ON YOUR KNEES BEGGING TO DIE, AND *SHE* WILL BE THE ONE TO KILL YOU.

NEVER!
GAACKK!

YOU CAN GIVE DRUCILLA A MESSAGE, ALONG WITH THIS.

NOTHING WILL STOP ME FROM GETTING TO ROSE.



DID HE JUST...?

I WOULDN'T DO THAT IF I WERE YOU.
LET ME COME WITH YOU.
YOU'D ONLY SLOW ME DOWN.
I CAN GET YOU IN. LET ME COME WITH YOU.
SHE TOOK SOMEONE I LOVED ONCE, TOO, SIMON.

PLEASE... WHATEVER HAS PASSED BETWEEN US...LET ME HELP YOU GET YOUR ROSE BACK.

WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED?!

IT WOULD SEEM EVEN SWORN ENEMIES CAN UNITE IN THE FACE OF A GREATER EVIL.

LIKE *HELL* THEY CAN!
WE JUST LET A VILE MURDERER RIDE OFF WITH A DEAD PRINCE TO SAVE ROSE?

HAS THE WHOLE FLIPPING WORLD GONE MAD?

-COUGH- DON'T KNOW 'BOUT THE MAD PART...

...BUT IT COULD STOP SPINNIN'.
WILL! WHAT HAVE THE TWO OF YOU GOTTEN INTO SINCE I LEFT YOU AT MILLHAVEN?
NOTHING. I SWEAR!
OKAY, OKAY! MAYBE WE KILLED A PATROL, BUT THEY MURDERED AN ENTIRE VILLAGE BECAUSE THEY CLAIMED IT HAD THE--
PLAGUE.

UHHHHH...
W...WHERE...
WELCOME, GUARDIAN.
THE MASTER WILL BE PLEASED YOU'VE FINALLY DECIDED TO JOIN US.

FOURTEEN

WELL, WELL, WELL... OUR LITTLE GUARDIAN HAS DECIDED TO JOIN US.

WHO ARE YOU? AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH THORNE?

THORNE IS NO LONGER YOUR CONCERN. HE BELONGS TO ***DRUCILLA*** NOW.

THORNE DOESN'T BELONG TO ANYONE! ***ESPECIALLY*** DRUCILLA!

WHERE IS SHE ANYWAY? SHOULDN'T SHE BE HERE TO GLOAT?

YOU GUARDIANS ARE ALL THE SAME. YOU WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT OTHERS, WHEN YOU REALLY SHOULD BE PREPARING YOURSELF.

WORRYING ABOUT OTHERS IS EXACTLY WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GUARDIAN. AND WHEN I GET OUT OF HERE--

HAHAHA
DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU ARE THE FIRST GUARDIAN TO BE HELD HERE?

THE MORE YOU TRY TO USE YOUR MAGIC DOWN HERE, THE STRONGER YOUR BONDS BECOME.

AND I WOULD NOT BOTHER CRYING FOR HELP EITHER.

THERE ARE CREATURES DOWN HERE FAR WORSE THAN THE ONE THAT BROUGHT YOU.

I'D HATE FOR YOU TO WAKE ANY OF THEM. THEY HAVEN'T BEEN FED FOR A VERY, VERY LONG TIME.

GULP

THE REBEL CAMP.
WHAT THE HELL IS THE POINT?!
HMMM... SORRY...WHAT WAS WHAT?
ALL OF IT. THE REBELLION. THE GUARDIAN. AND NOW FEL...
EVERY TIME WE GET KNOCKED DOWN, WE PICK OURSELVES UP, PUSH AHEAD, ONLY TO GET KICKED BACK DOWN EVEN HARDER THE NEXT TIME.
I MEAN, AT SOME POINT THERE WON'T BE ANY OF US LEFT TO GET BACK UP. AND FOR WHAT?!

WE'RE HERE. YOU CAN DROP THE ACT.
YOU CAN'T *POSSIBLY* BELIEVE ANYONE WAS FOOLED BY THIS CHARADE OF REDEMPTION, CAN YOU?
SIR DANTE, THE "NOBLE KNIGHT"? RIGHT UP TO THE MOMENT YOU HANDED ROSE OVER TO DRUCILLA.
YOU MUST HAVE BEEN FURIOUS WHEN WE SHOWED UP AND ALMOST FOILED YOUR PLAN? WAS THAT WHY YOU BROUGHT IN THE DEMON? TO DISTRACT US?
BUT, IT'S JUST THE TWO OF *US* NOW, KNIGHT.
I KNOW *EXACTLY* WHO YOU ARE, AND THERE'S NO ONE HERE TO INTERFERE.

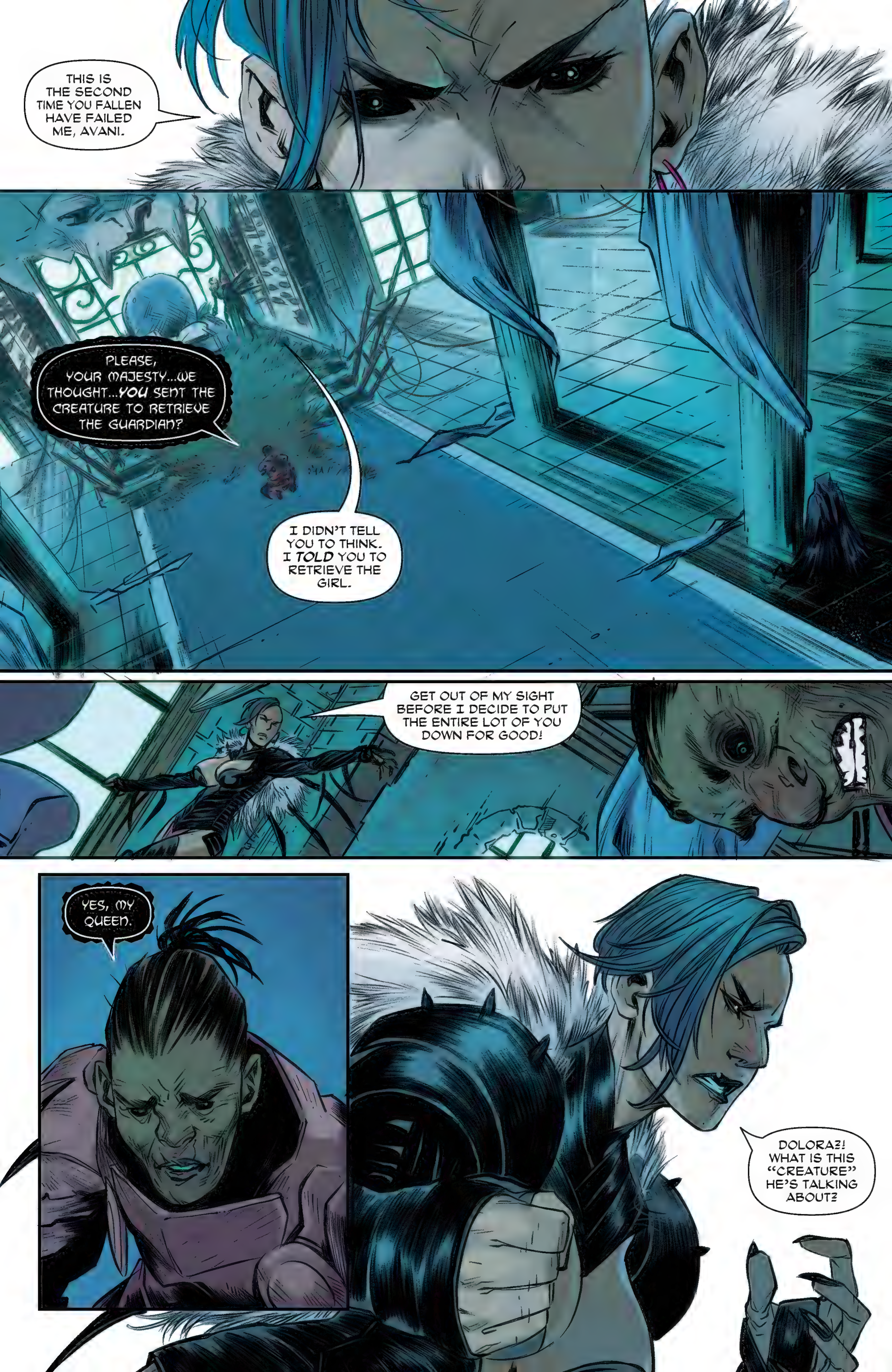
YOU'RE RIGHT, PRINCE FELIX.

THE TIME FOR INTERFERENCE IS DONE.

CRRAACK!

IT'S TIME FOR *ACTION*.

ANOTHER REBEL PRISONER FOR THE DUNGEONS.


THIS IS THE SECOND TIME YOU FALLEN HAVE FAILED ME, AVANI.
PLEASE, YOUR MAJESTY...WE THOUGHT...YOU SENT THE CREATURE TO RETRIEVE THE GUARDIAN?
I DIDN'T TELL YOU TO THINK. I TOLD YOU TO RETRIEVE THE GIRL.
GET OUT OF MY SIGHT BEFORE I DECIDE TO PUT THE ENTIRE LOT OF YOU DOWN FOR GOOD!
YES, MY QUEEN.
DOLORAZ! WHAT IS THIS "CREATURE" HE'S TALKING ABOUT?

I'VE NEVER HEARD OF SUCH A THING BEING ASSOCIATED WITH A GUARDIAN, BUT I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN FIND OUT.
WITH THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW GUARDIAN, IT'S POSSIBLE THAT THE FALLEN ARE NOT AS LOYAL AS THEY ONCE WERE. MAKE SURE THORNE IS SECURE WHILE YOU'RE AT IT.
AND I'M GOING TO DESTROY THAT WRETCHED LITTLE GIRL IF IT'S THE LAST THING I--YOU!

MY QUEEN. I HAVE FAILED YOU. FORGIVE ME.
DANTE? BUT HOW...?
AND WHAT IS TO BE THE EXCUSE FOR YOUR FAILURE THIS TIME, KNIGHT?
AS YOU REQUESTED, I TRACKED THE SOURCE MAGIC TO A YOUNG WOMAN BY THE NAME OF ROSE. I WAS ABOUT TO SEIZE HER WHEN...
...SHE...SHE CALLED DOWN... SOME SORT OF WINGED CREATURE... AND FLED. I TRIED TO FOLLOW, BUT...I COULD NOT.

TWICE NOW TODAY HAVE I HEARD FAILURE BLAMED ON SOME SORT OF MYTHICAL WINGED DEMON.
FAILURE IS EITHER INCOMPETENCE OR BETRAYAL, DANTE.
CLANG
MEET ME IN THE LOWER DUNGEONS AT FIRST LIGHT TOMORROW MORNING. I HAVE A JOB FOR YOU.

A DEFEATIST. THAT'S WHAT MY FATHER USED TO CALL PEOPLE LIKE YOU.
I'M SORRY? I DON'T THINK I HEARD YOU CORRECTLY, BOOKWORM.
ILA AND THE RIGHTFUL KING OF TTEREVE HAVE ESCAPED DRUCILLA'S CLUTCHES.
AND ROSE HAS MANAGED TO TURN THE MOST VILE KILLER IN THE QUEEN'S ARMY INTO HER LOYAL COMPANION. BUT ALL *YOU* CAN THINK ABOUT IS WHAT'S GOING WRONG.
WHEN YOU'VE SACRIFICED YOUR FRIENDS TO A WORTHLESS CAUSE *THEN* YOU CAN JUDGE ME.
JUDGE YOU! YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT I'M GOING TO JUDGE YOU.
EVERYONE AROUND YOU IS EITHER FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIFE OR THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE AROUND THEM AND YOU HAVE THE GALL TO ASK WHY.
WHY? BECAUSE THE ALTERNATIVE IS WORSE!
WORSE?! YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT WORSE?!

I'VE GIVEN *EVERYTHING* TO THIS REBELLION WHILE YOU'VE SPENT YOUR DAYS WITH YOUR NOSE SAFELY TUCKED AWAY IN SOME DUSTY BOOK.
TELL ME. HOW MANY FRIENDS HAVE YOU SEEN CUT DOWN IN FRONT OF YOU ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE?
DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT DEFEAT UNTIL YOU HAVE BEEN ELBOW-DEEP IN YOUR BROTHER'S GUTS.
GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME!
HAVE THE TWO OF YOU *COMPLETELY* LOST YOUR MINDS?!

IF WE TURN ON EACH OTHER, DRUCILLA HAS WON.
WE WILL BE NO BETTER THAN THOSE WE FIGHT AGAINST...WE WILL NEVER HEAL FEL OR RESCUE ROSE!
ARTUS. BEFORE SHE DIED, YOUR MOTHER WROTE TO ME THAT SHE WAS WORKING ON A CURE FOR THE PLAGUE. IS IT POSSIBLE ANY OF HER NOTES SURVIVED?

I GUESS. I MEAN. I HONESTLY DON'T KNOW.
AFTER DRUCILLA... AFTER SHE DIED... I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO GO INTO HER LABORATORY.
I THINK IT'S TIME.
WILL. TAKE ARTUS AND SEE WHAT THE TWO OF YOU CAN FIND IN MADAME GRAY'S NOTES.
YEAH. SURE. WHATEVER YOU NEED, ILA. I'LL TAKE CARE OF THE KID.
AS LONG AS HE KEEPS HIS FAT MOUTH SHUT.
THIS ISN'T OVER, BOOKWORM.

FELIX. LUNCH!
THAT'S ALL I COULD TAKE WITHOUT RAISING SUSPICION. SOMETHING'S UP. DRUCILLA'S GOT THE PALACE ON LOCKDOWN.

SEEMS LIKE MY SISTER IS FINALLY STARTING TO LEARN ONE REAPS WHAT ONE SOWS. THE BETRAYER NOW EXPECTS TO BE BETRAYED.
THANKS FOR THE FOOD.
AFTER THAT BLOW YOU LAID ON ME, I'M LUCKY TO BE ABLE TO CHEW.
REMEMBER THAT THE NEXT TIME YOU WANT TO GET BETWEEN ME AND RESCUING ROSE.
SHE'S CHANGED YOU. THE GIRL. WHAT IS IT ABOUT HER THAT DEMANDS SUCH PASSIONATE LOYALTY?
IF I HAVE TO EXPLAIN IT, YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND.
NOW GET YOUR FACE ON. EVEN WITH YOU AS UGLY AS YOU ARE NOW, YOU'RE PROBABLY STILL TOO RECOGNIZABLE.

WELL, WE CAN'T ALL BE BLESSED WITH A FACE LIKE YOURS.
IT'S LATE ENOUGH, EVERYONE SHOULD BE ASLEEP.
LET'S FIND THORNE AND ROSE BEFORE MY SISTER CHANGES HER MIND AND DECIDES TO LOP OFF YOUR HEAD TOMORROW MORNING. SHE'S FUNNY LIKE THAT.
DRUCILLA SAID SHE HAD A JOB FOR ME IN THE LOWER DUNGEONS. WE'LL START THERE.
AND YOU MIGHT WANT TO LOWER THOSE SHOULDERS A BIT THERE, PRINCELING. WORKING FOR YOUR SISTER DOESN'T EXACTLY MAKE A PERSON PROUD.
YOU FORGET. I SPENT YEARS AS HER PRISONER. I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT TOO MUCH TIME WITH MY SISTER CAN DO TO A PERSON.

SHE'S NOT HERE. NEITHER OF THEM ARE.
DAMN IT! WHERE IS SHE KEEPING THEM?
PSSST. OVER HERE.
DEAR GOD! IS THAT...?

THORNE.

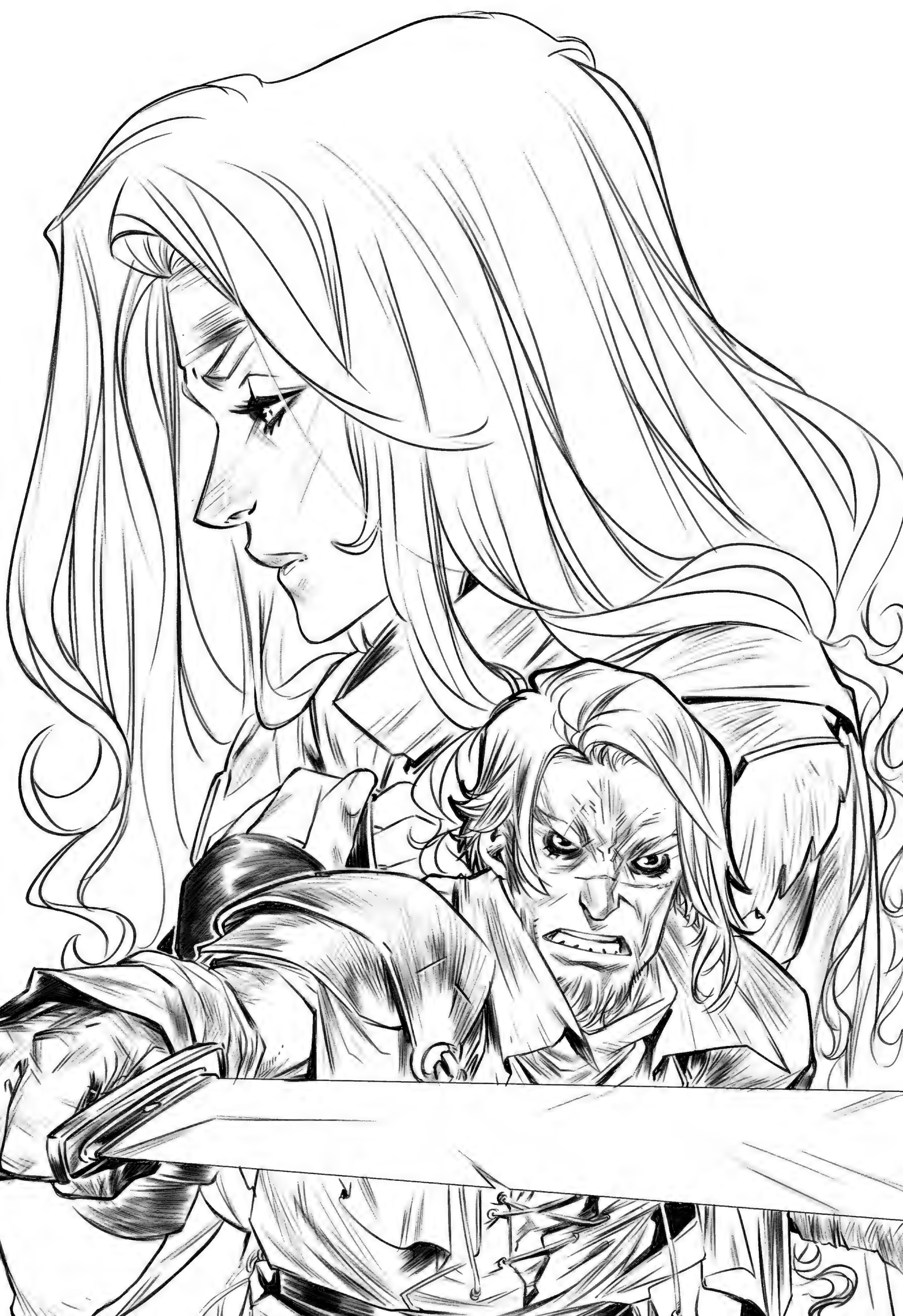
HE'S DEAD AND IT'S ALL MY FAULT.
NO. IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S STILL BREATHING. BARELY.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND... I THOUGHT...SHE WANTED THE KHAT. WHY WOULD SHE DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS?
SHE'S NOT TRYING TO KILL HIM, SIMON. SHE'S TRYING TO BREAK HIM.
DRUCILLA HAS MADE TORTURE INTO AN ART FORM.
WE HAVE TO FIND ROSE! NOW! IF DRUCILLA HAS DONE THAT TO THORNE...
AGREED. EVEN IF WE COULD FREE HIM, HE ISN'T IN ANY STATE TO WALK OUT OF HERE. HE NEEDS HIS GUARDIAN. WHEREVER SHE IS.

WE WILL HAVE TO PERFORM THE RITUAL TONIGHT. DRUCILLA IS BECOMING SUSPICIOUS.
SHE KNOWS YOU TOOK THE GIRL. I CAN'T RISK HER TRACKING YOU BACK TO ME.
TAKE THESE TO THE TEMPLE. I'LL FOLLOW WITH THE GIRL AS SOON AS I'VE PREPARED HER.
PREPARED HER FOR WHAT EXACTLY, DOLORA?

I'D SAY THAT I'M DISAPPOINTED IN YOU, DOLORA...
...BUT SINCE YOU TAUGHT ME EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT CRUELTY AND DECEPTION, I'M REALLY NOT ALL THAT SURPRISED.
YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO MAKE JUDGMENTS BASED ON BROKEN FRAGMENTS OF MISHEARD CONVERSATIONS.
IT'S TRUE I DIDN'T TELL YOU I'D FOUND THE GIRL, BUT ONLY SO THAT I COULD PRESENT HER TO YOU.
I COULD THINK OF NO GIFT MORE SUITABLE FOR THE BRIDE OF BALOR THAN THE ONE THING THAT STANDS BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR POSSESSION OF THE KHAT.
COME NOW POPPET, PUT THE SWORD AWAY. WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES.

YOU'RE RIGHT AS ALWAYS, DOLORA. I'VE BEEN A FOOL.
SLASH
OR I WOULD HAVE BEEN IF I CONTINUED TO BELIEVE A WORD YOU SAID.
HELLO, ROSE. YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW HAPPY I AM NOW THAT YOU HAVE FINALLY DECIDED TO JOIN US.

FIFTEEN



THE REBEL CAMP.

MMMM... NO...NOT GONNA...

SHHHH, THERE NOW, MY BOY. JUST A COUPLE MORE SIPS AND I WILL LET YOU SLEEP.

WE 'AVE T' GET OUTTA HERE!

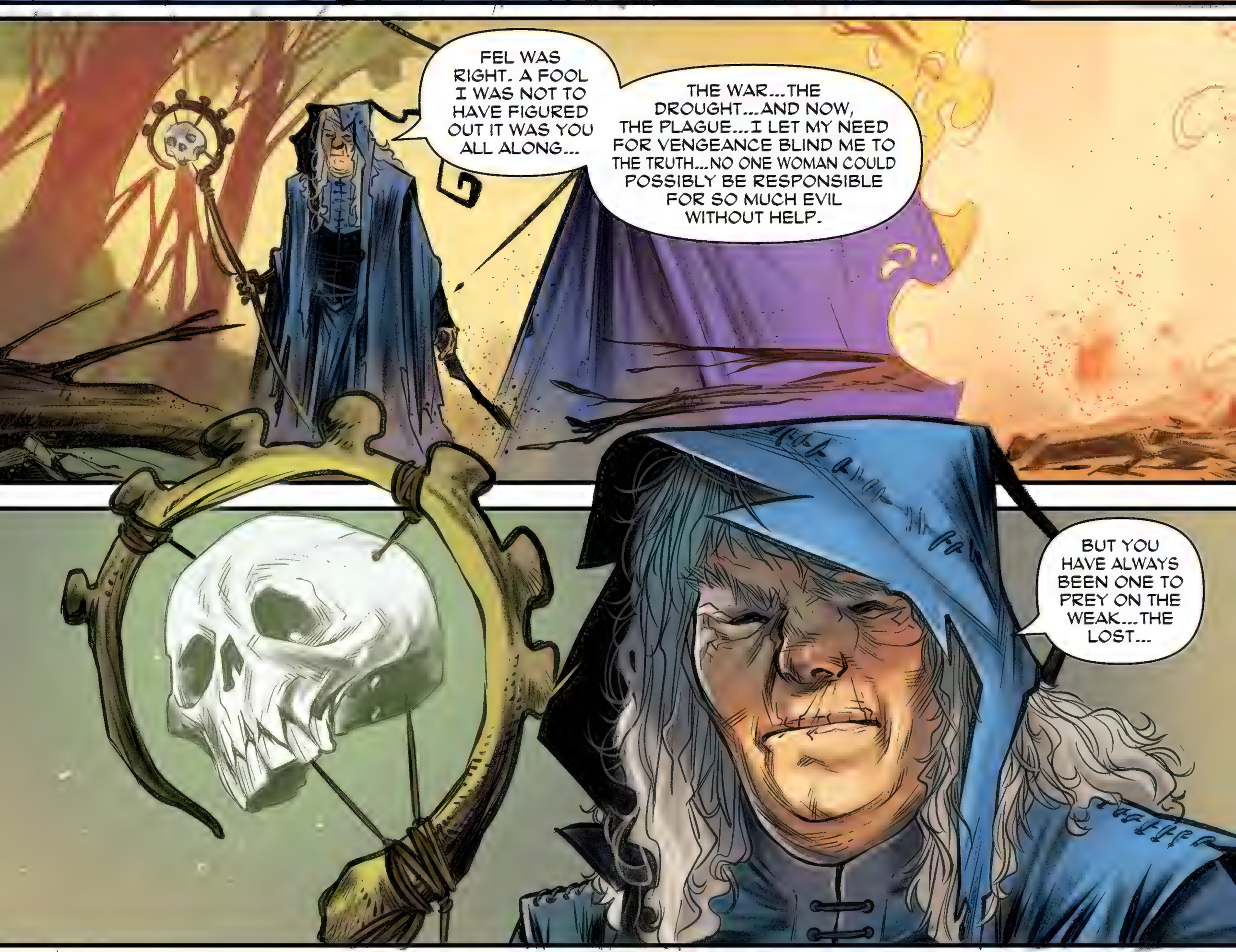
HE'S COMIN' FER US!

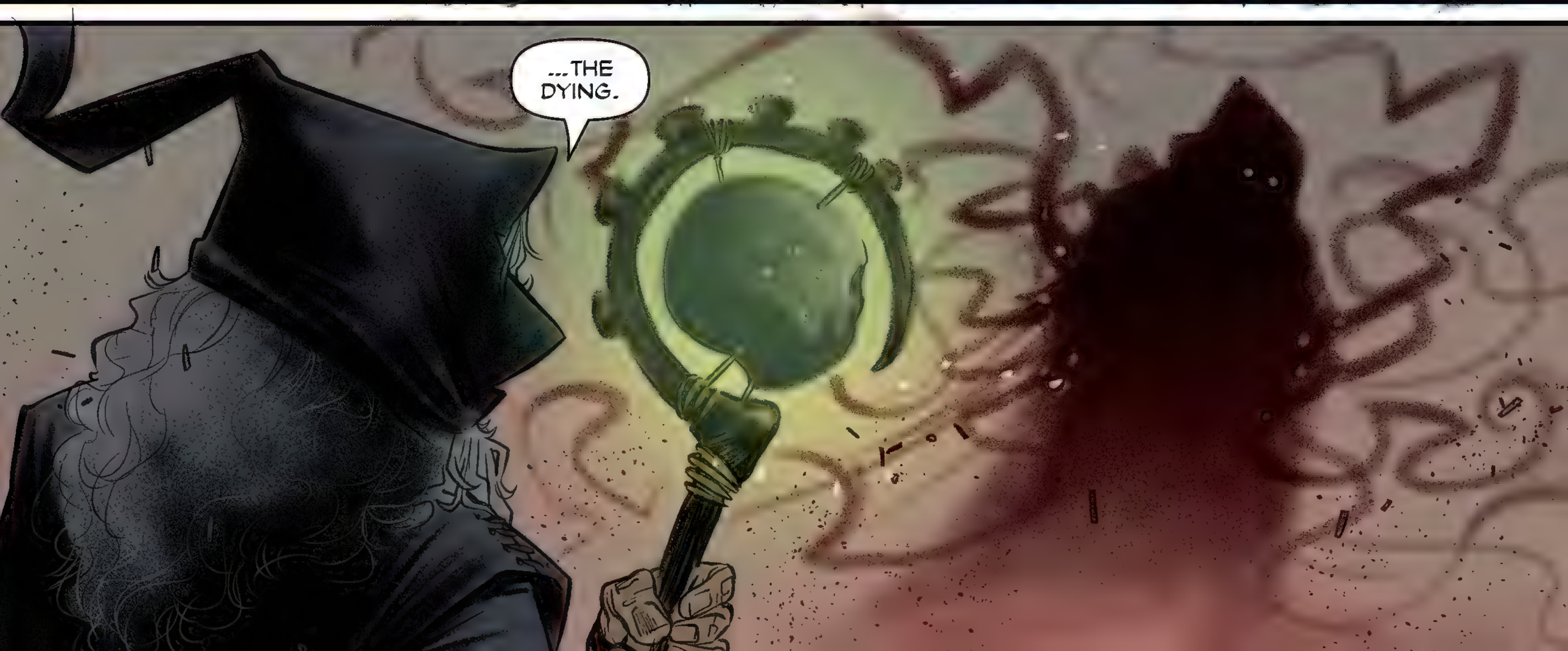
NO ONE IS COMING FOR ANYONE. IT IS JUST YOU AND I.

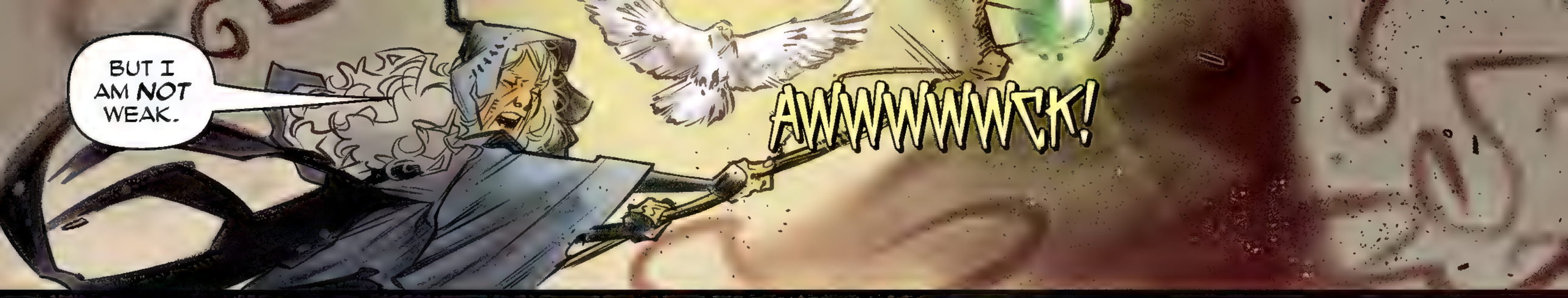
YOU ARE SAFE.

N' ONE'S SAFE...

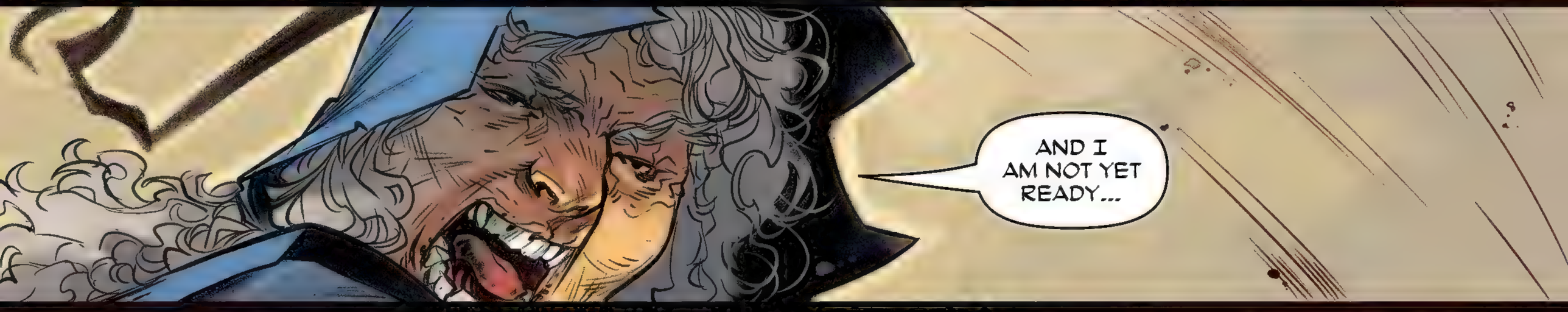
-SIGH- FATHER, WE NEED--


FEL WAS RIGHT. A FOOL I WAS NOT TO HAVE FIGURED OUT IT WAS YOU ALL ALONG...
THE WAR...THE DROUGHT...AND NOW, THE PLAGUE...I LET MY NEED FOR VENGEANCE BLIND ME TO THE TRUTH...NO ONE WOMAN COULD POSSIBLY BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SO MUCH EVIL WITHOUT HELP.
BUT YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ONE TO PREY ON THE WEAK...THE LOST...


...THE DYING.


BUT I AM NOT WEAK.
AWWWWWCK!

AND I AM NO LONGER LOST.


AND I AM NOT YET READY...

...TO DIE!
CRAAAAKKKKOWWWW

POOMPF

THANK YOU, MY FRIEND.

THUD

THE CITY OF VENTA BELGARUM
THE SEWERS, ARTUS? YOU REALLY COULDN'T HAVE COME UP WITH ANOTHER WAY INTO THE CITY?
OH SURE, THERE ARE LOTS OF WAYS WE COULD HAVE GOTTEN INTO THE CITY...
...I JUST THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE THE MOST FUN.
MAYBE IF SOMEONE DIDN'T HAVE A BOUNTY ON HIS HEAD...

IF MEMORY SERVES, THIS COMES OUT DIRECTLY BEHIND MY MOTHER'S HOUSE.
SHOULD I BOTHER TO ASK WHY YOU HAVE THE SEWERS COMMITTED TO MEMORY?
PART OF BEING A PHYSICIAN IS LEARNING HOW DISEASE IS SPREAD.
MY MOTHER FELT VERY STRONGLY THAT THE WAYS IN WHICH WE DEAL WITH OUR--
LOOK OUT!

SPLOOOSH!

NOT-ONE-WORD!
I WOULDN'T DREAM OF IT.

WHAT'S TAKING SO LONG? WE'RE TOO EXPOSED OUT HERE.

THE LOCK SEEMS TO BE FROZEN. WE NEED SOME SORT OF LUBRICANT TO--

CLANGK!

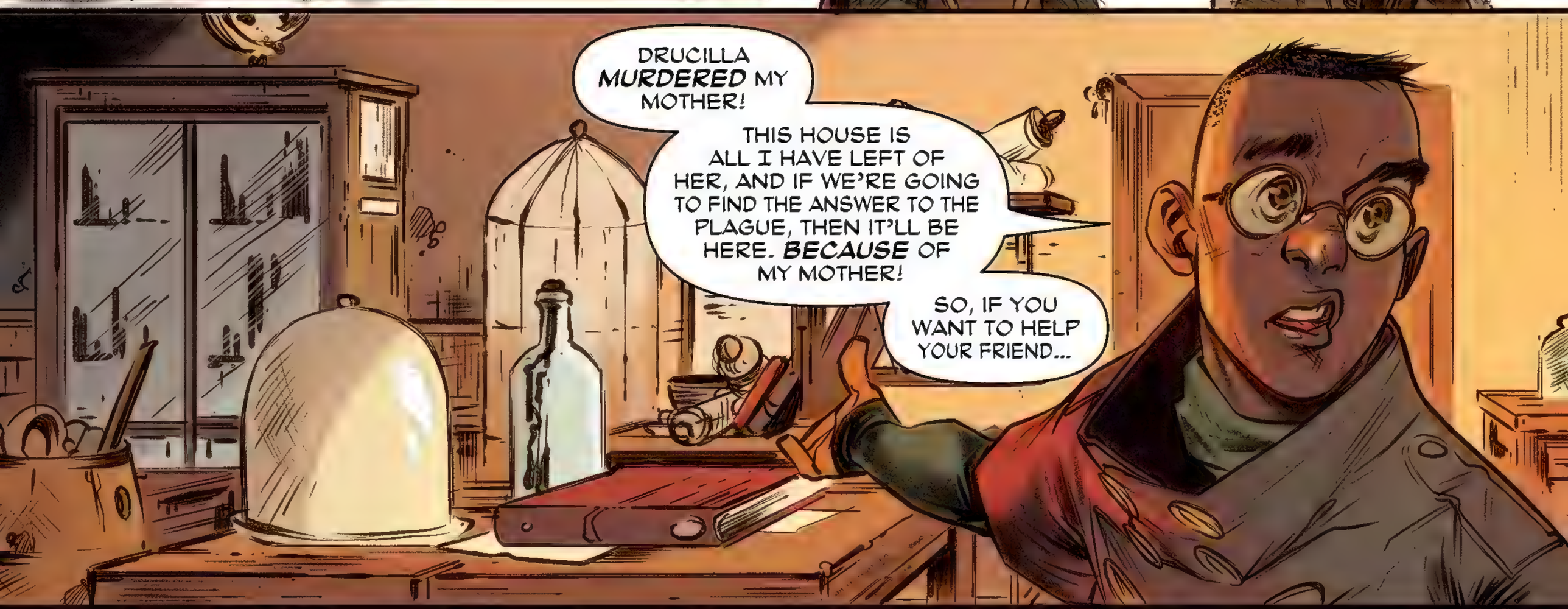
UM, YES. OR THAT COULD WORK, TOO.

JUST GET INSIDE BEFORE SOMEONE SEES US.

LOOK AT THIS PLACE! HOW IN THE BLAZES ARE WE GOING TO FIND ANYTHING IN THIS MESS?
MMMMM.
I MEAN, WHAT THE HELL ARE WE EVEN LOOKING FOR?!
HEY!

GIVE ME THAT!

LOOK! I KNOW YOU WANT TO HELP FEL, I KNOW YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT ROSE, BUT YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS SUFFERED.


DRUCILLA MURDERED MY MOTHER!
THIS HOUSE IS ALL I HAVE LEFT OF HER, AND IF WE'RE GOING TO FIND THE ANSWER TO THE PLAGUE, THEN IT'LL BE HERE. BECAUSE OF MY MOTHER!
SO, IF YOU WANT TO HELP YOUR FRIEND...

SORRY, ARTUS. I DIDN'T KNOW.

I JUST HOPE IT'S HERE.

YOU WANTED TO SEE ME, MY QUEEN?

SIR DANTE. THE LOYAL KNIGHT.

EVEN WHEN WE WERE YOUNG, BEFORE I WAS QUEEN, I HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN I COULD COUNT ON YOU.

WE GO BACK A LONG WAY, YOU AND I, MMMMH?

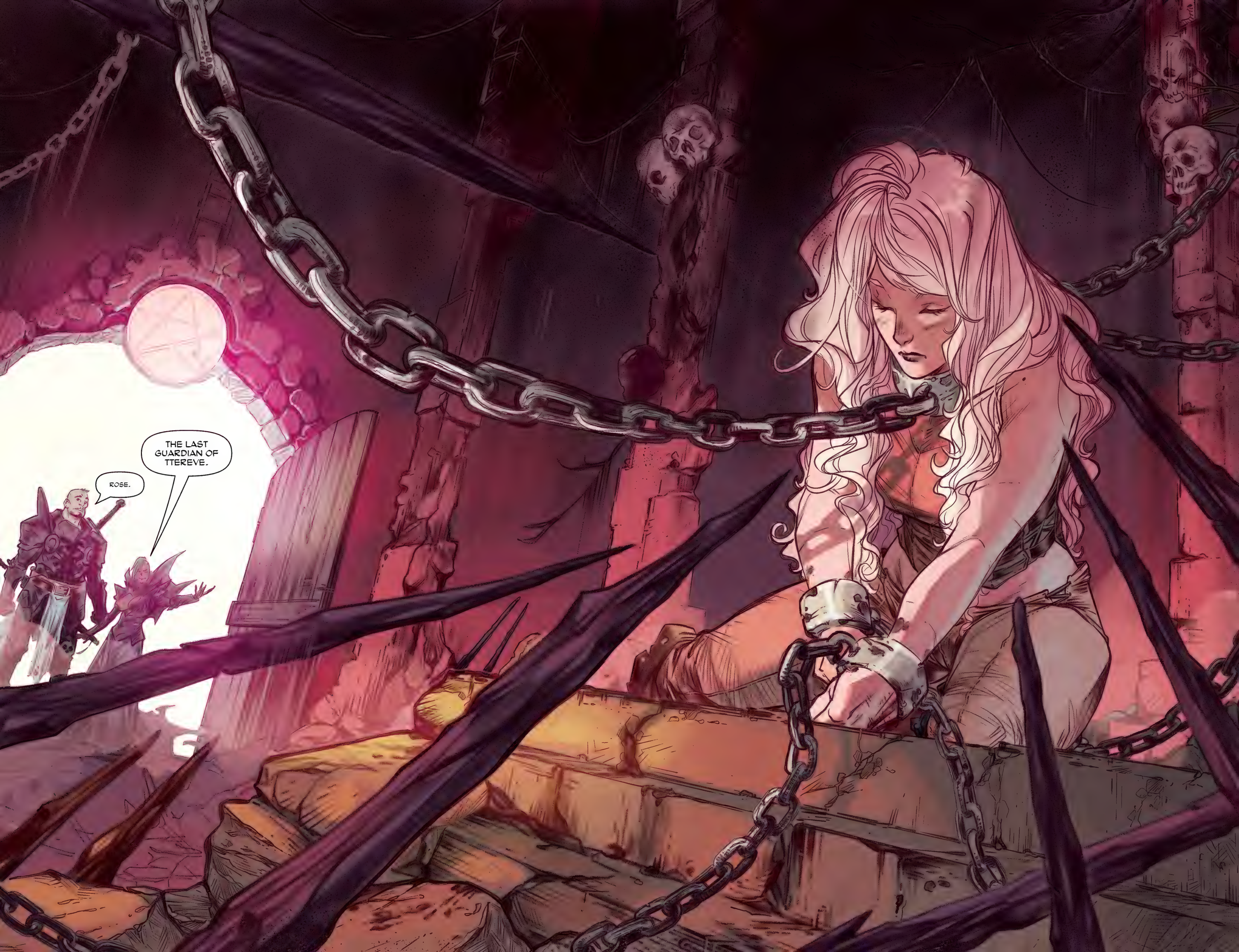
YOUR MAJESTY, I--

COME. I HAVE SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU.

YEARS OF MY FATHER'S LENIENCY MADE THIS COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE SOFT.
WE BARGAINED AWAY OUR RESOURCES, OUR PEOPLE...OUR PRINCESSES, INSTEAD OF TAKING WHAT WAS RIGHTFULLY OURS!

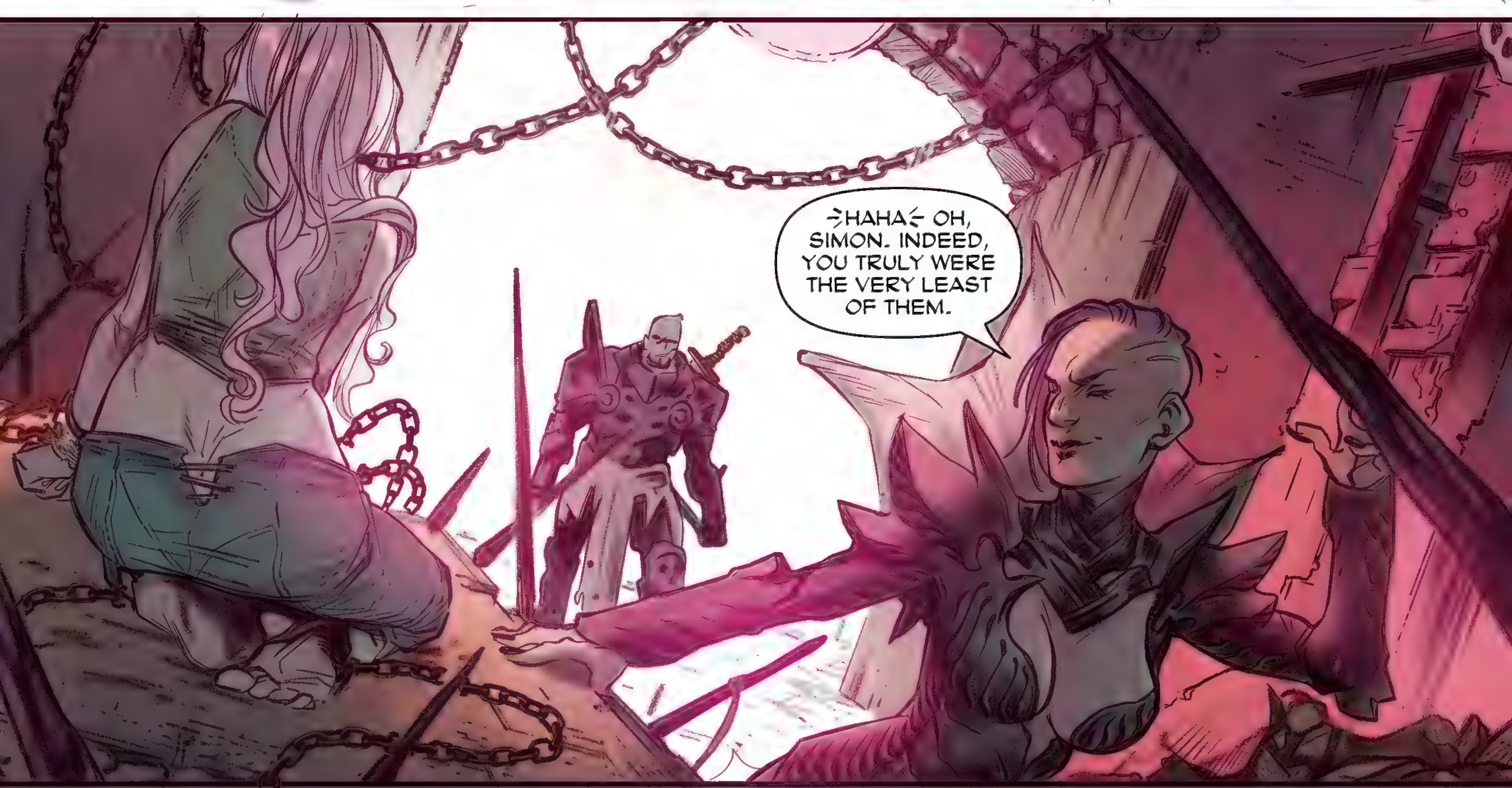
AND WE IGNORED OUR MOST POWERFUL ASSET...THE GREAT KHATS AND THEIR MAGIC.

BUT ALL THAT IS ABOUT TO CHANGE. BECAUSE, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, THE KEY TO THAT POWER IS FINALLY IN MY HANDS.


THE LAST GUARDIAN OF TTEREVE.
ROSE.

CONGRATULATIONS ON HER CAPTURE, MY QUEEN.

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT I WAS NOT THE ONLY WEAPON IN YOUR ARSENAL.



THAT IS...IF HE DOESN'T KILL YOU FIRST.

SCREEEEEEEEEE

MY QUEEN, I DON'T...?
POOR, SIMPLE SIMON. YOU SHOULD HAVE STUCK TO KILLING. TREACHERY IS A GAME THAT SHOULD ONLY BE PLAYED BY THE CLEVER.

RRRRRRRRRRRR

IF WE DON'T LEAVE NOW, WE AREN'T GOING TO BE ALIVE LONG ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT THE PLAGUE. OR ANYTHING ELSE.
I KNOW IT'S HERE SOMEWHERE.
TIME'S UP, ARTUS. I'VE SEEN THREE PATROLS GO BY IN THE LAST FIVE MINUTES ALONE.
NO. WAIT. THIS IS IT!
NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON. WE'VE GOT COMPANY.

BAM
BAM
BAM
OPEN UP, REBEL. WE KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE.
AH, HELL!
THERE SHOULD BE SOMETHING AROUND HERE I CAN USE TO--
I'M TRULY SORRY, ARTUS.
THWACK
BUT SAVING FEL'S LIFE IS TOO IMPORTANT TO RISK LETTING YOU FALL INTO DRUCILLA'S HANDS.

...MMMMHHH...
WHERE AM... WHAT...?
BJARKE. HOW DID YOU...? HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN UNCONSCIOUS?
FEL! FEL IS IN THERE!

NO...NO...NO!
NO!

YOU THOUGHT I DIDN'T KNOW? YOU ALWAYS WERE SO EASY TO READ... TO MANIPULATE.

YOUR DEFORMITY MAKES YOU VULNERABLE TO EVEN A SINGLE SMILE FROM A PRETTY FACE?

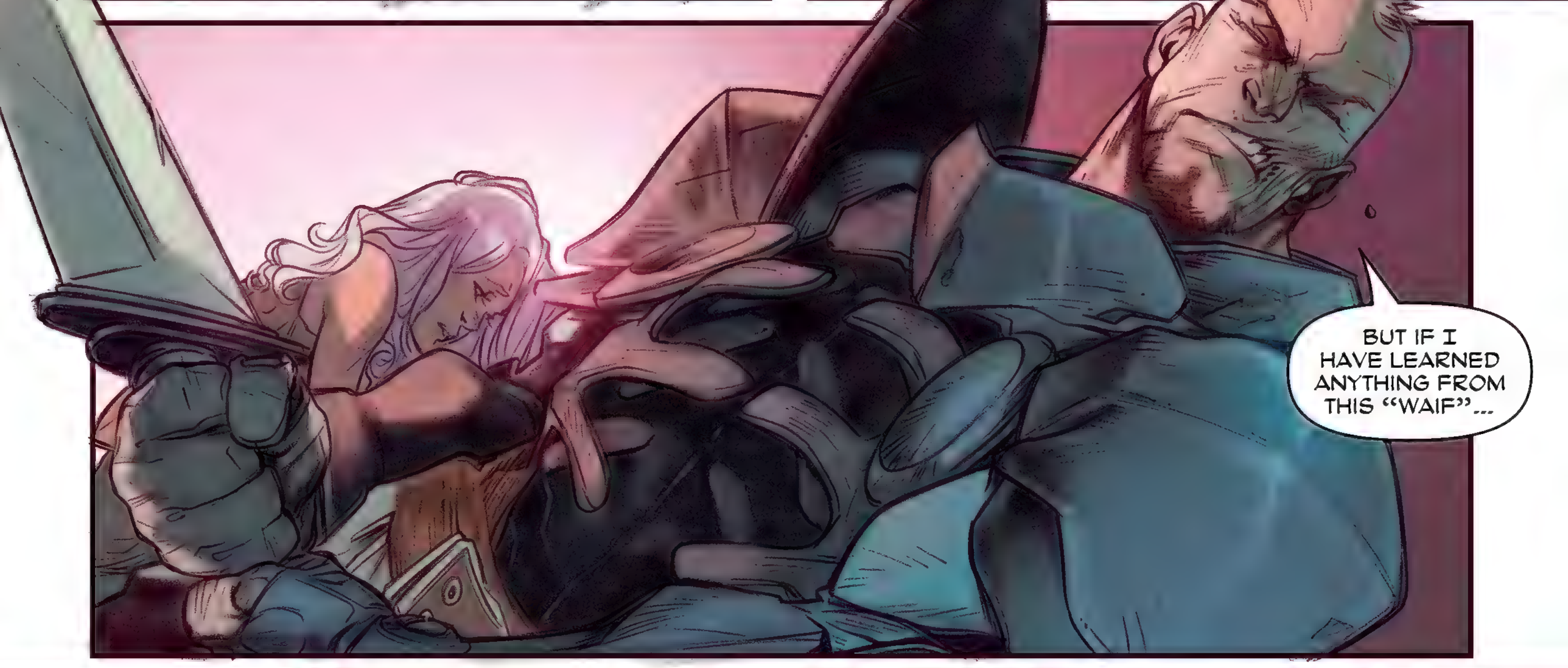
AND I SUPPOSE SHE'S PRETTY ENOUGH... FOR AN INSIPID WAIF.

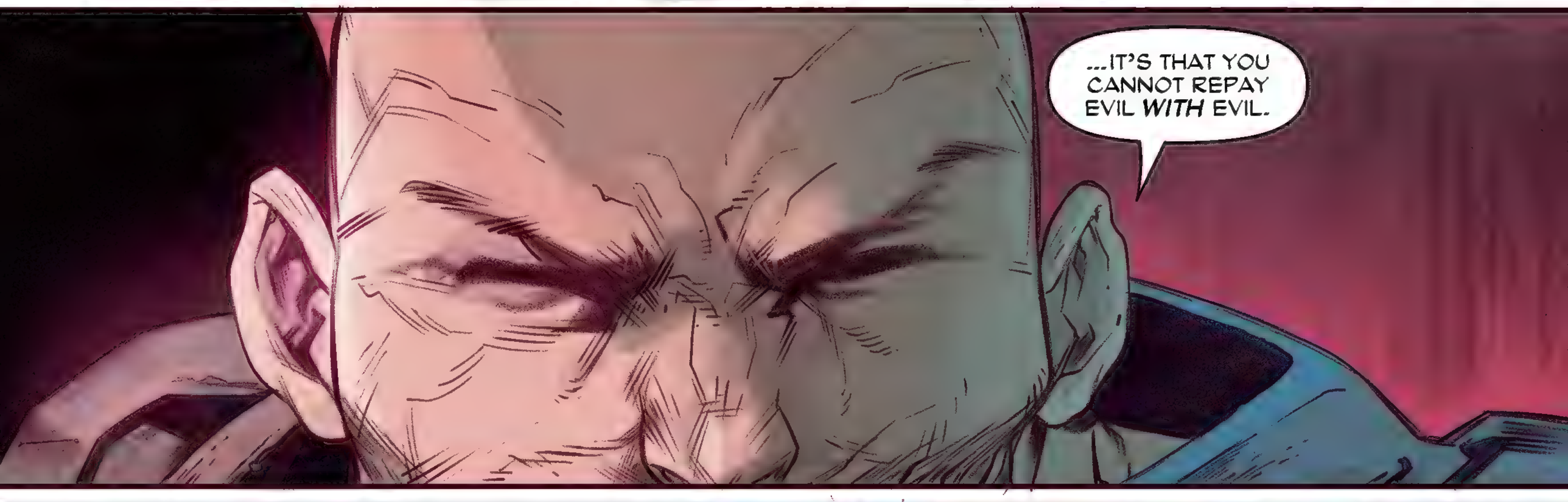
I, ON THE OTHER HAND, PREFER MY TOYS TO BE A LITTLE MORE... *EXHILARATING.*

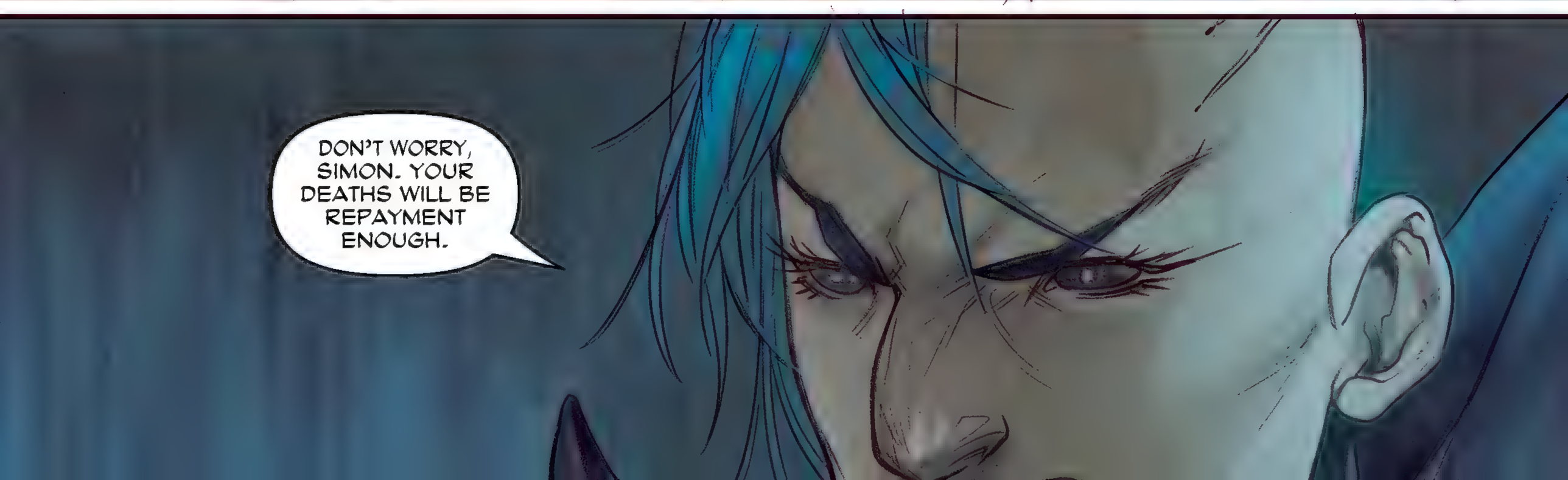
Ñ-Ñ-NNNRRLLL

SEEING WHAT YOU HAVE DONE TO ROSE...TO THORNE...

...IT ONLY CONFIRMS THAT YOU HAVE HELD THIS LAND IN YOUR EVIL GRIP FOR FAR TOO LONG, DRUCILLA.


BUT IF I HAVE LEARNED ANYTHING FROM THIS "WAIF"...


...IT'S THAT YOU CANNOT REPAY EVIL *WITH* EVIL.


DON'T WORRY, SIMON. YOUR DEATHS WILL BE REPAYMENT ENOUGH.

KILL THEM!
SIMON... DON'T...

SIXTEEN

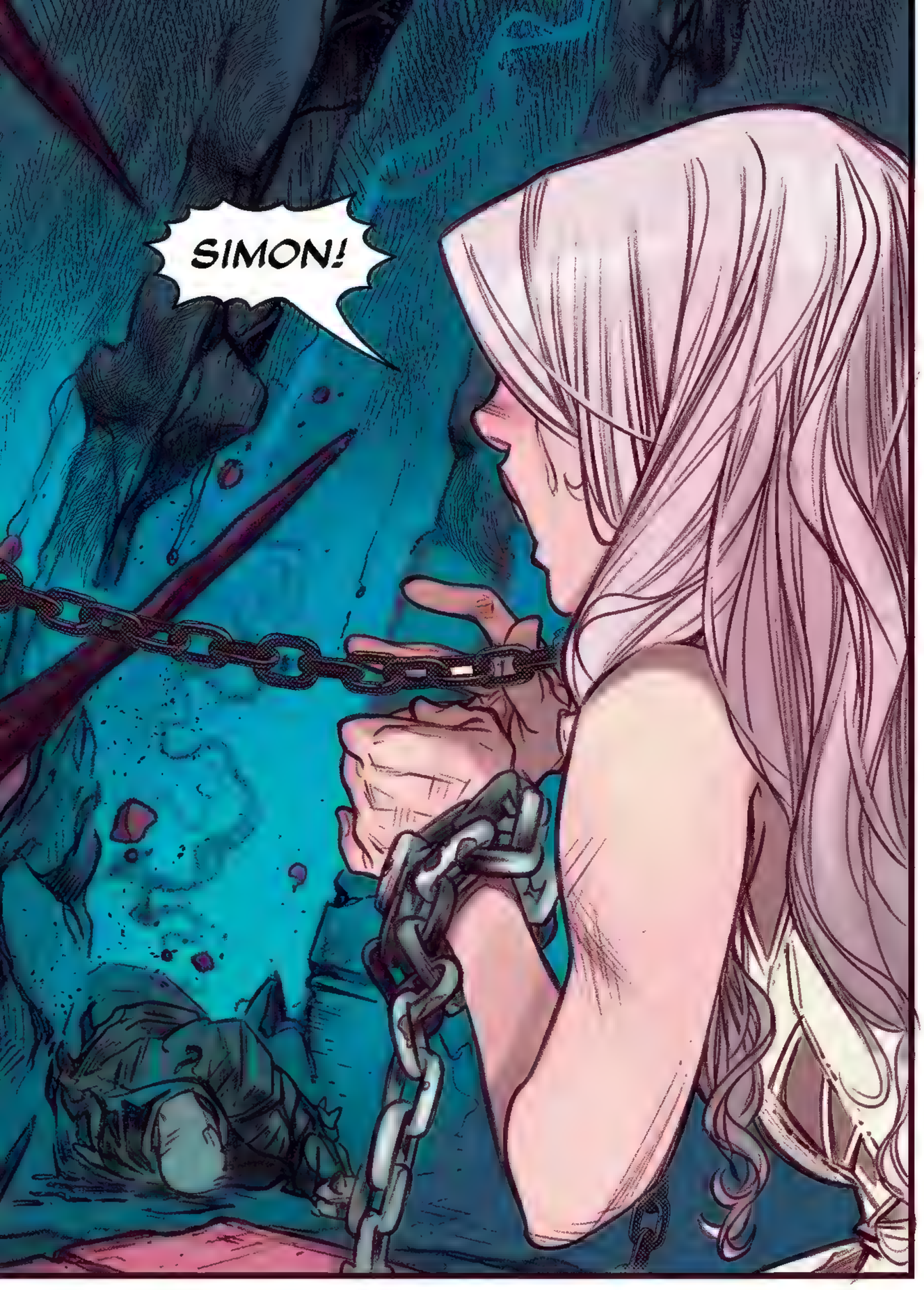
"DON'T HURT HIM!"
THEN CALL HIM OFF, ROSE, BEFORE I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING WE'LL *BOTH* REGRET!
SNRAHH
GRRRRRRAWRRRL!
=SOB= I CAN'T GET THROUGH TO HIM... =SOB=
PLEASE, SIMON! YOU HAVE TO SAVE HIM!
AH, HELL...

I'M ABOUT TO WRESTLE A MAGIC-CRAZED CREATURE WITH 9-INCH CLAWS AND YOU'RE ASKING ME TO SAVE HIM?!
RRRRAWOW!
YOU'RE HIS GUARDIAN! FIGHT FOR HIM, DAMN IT!
BECAUSE YOU SURE AS HELL HAVEN'T COME THIS FAR TO QUIT ON HIM NOW!
OOOOH! A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS AND HER KNIGHT IN TARNISHED ARMOR FENDING OFF THE FEROCIOUS MONSTER...HOW DELICIOUS!

I...I'M SORRY, SIMON. HER HOLD ON HIM...IT'S TOO STRONG.
I... CAN'T... REACH... HIM.
BECAUSE THORNE BELONGS TO ME NOW!
WITH THE POWER OF A KHAT AT MY COMMAND, I WILL HAVE DOMINION OVER LIFE AND DEATH ITSELF. PEOPLE WILL FALL AT MY FEET, AND I WILL BE A GOD!
=UMPPPFFFHH= THE GOD OF DARKNESS.

REMEMBER WHERE YOUR POWER LIES, ROSE!
DON'T LET DRUCILLA'S LIES TRICK YOU INTO FORGETTING HOW STRONG YOU REALLY ARE!
I *KNOW* YOU CAN DO THIS! YOU AND THORNE *BELONG* TOGETHER!

I...I CAN DO THIS.
YOU WERE NEVER THIS CHATTY AS MY CONSORT, SIMON.
YOUR CONSTANT MEDDLING IS GETTING TIRESOME.
THORNE IS...
...MINE!
CRANG!
YOU WOULD HAVE DONE WELL TO REMEMBER THAT.


SIMON!

ENOUGH! WHEN WILL THERE BE ENOUGH PAIN AND SUFFERING AND DEATH TO SATISFY YOU?

NEVER! THERE WILL NEVER BE ENOUGH.
NOW. KILL HER!

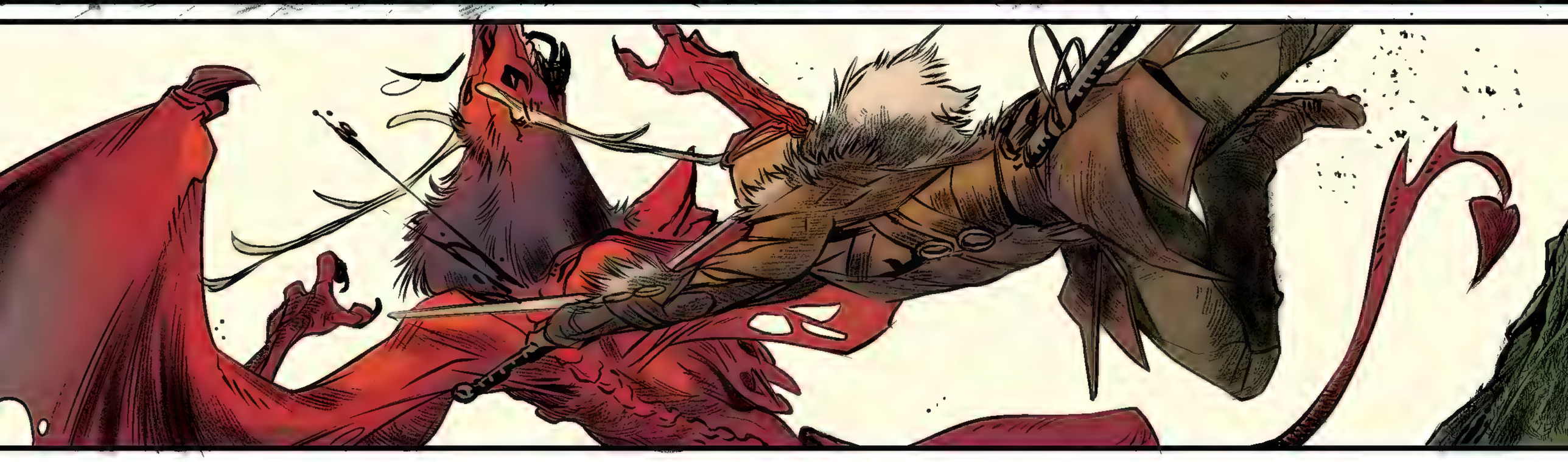
ARRRRRR!

ELSEWHERE IN THE CASTLE...
FOUR MEN... JUST TO GUARD THE FAMILY CRYPT...
WHAT ARE YOU UP TO, DRUZ

WHAT NEW HORRORS ARE YOU HIDING DOWN HERE?
THE DEVIL TAKE YOU, SISTER! WHAT HELL HAVE YOU UNLEASHED UPON US?

THE VEIL BETWEEN THE REALMS WILL BE THINNEST AT MIDNIGHT TONIGHT.

I THINK YOU'LL FIND THIS PRINCE *MORE* THAN YOU CAN HANDLE.



ELSEWHERE IN THE CITY.
COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP, REBE--!

YOU SAID I HAD TO COME OUT. YOU DIDN'T SAY *HOW*.

WINDOW OR DOOR, YER STILL A DEAD M--
DIDN'T EXPECT *THAT* EITHER, DID YA?
I'M JUST FULL OF SURPRISES TODAY.

THERE HE IS! GET 'IM!

I'M DOING MY PART, ARTUS...

...YOU DAMN WELL BETTER DO YOURS...

WILL, YOU BRAVE FOOL. I PROMISE YOUR SACRIFICE WON'T BE IN VAIN.

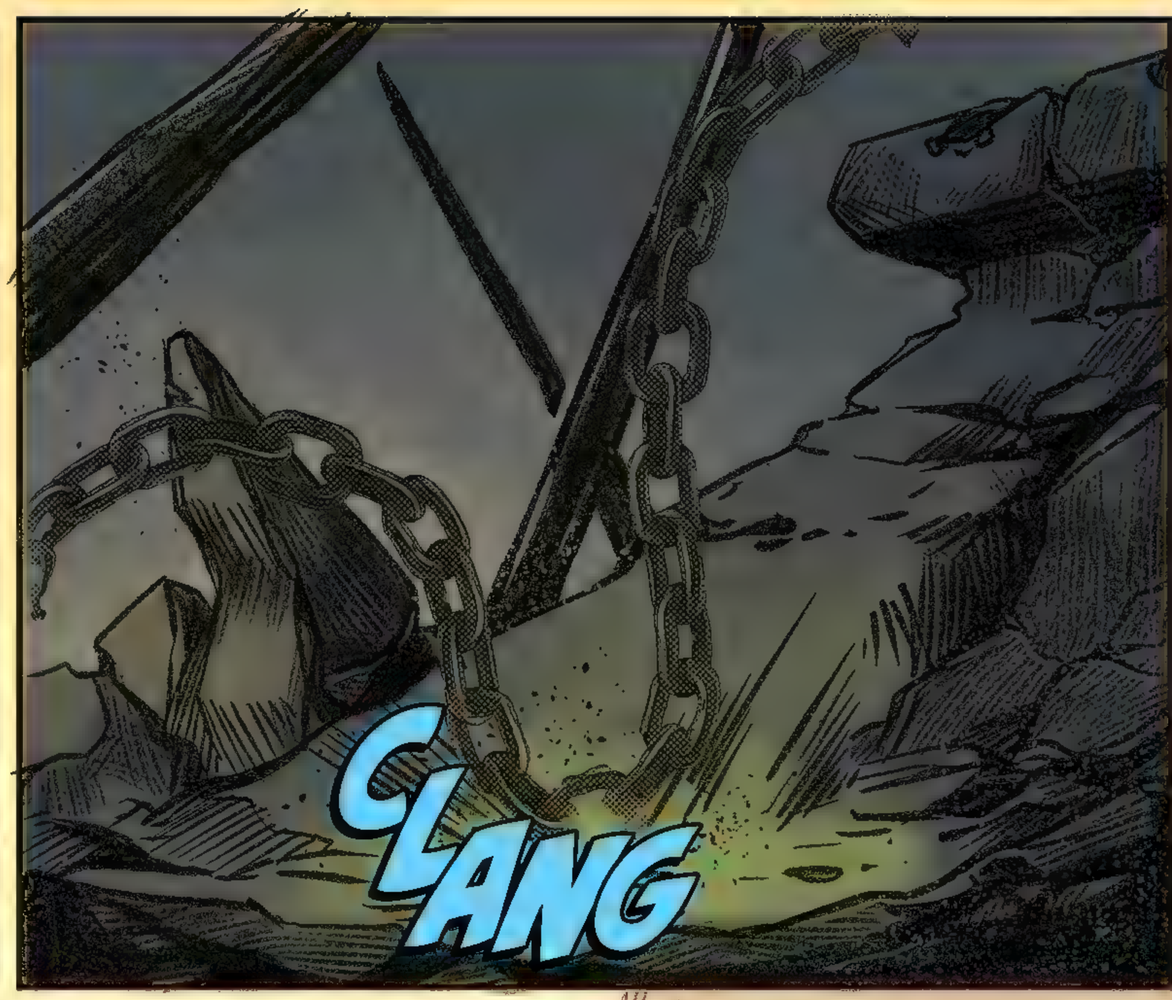
I CAN'T LOOK AT THIS.
MY BELOVED THORNE. LOOK AT WHAT SHE'S DONE TO YOU.
I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME... I KNOW THERE IS A SMALL PART OF YOU THAT IS STILL MY THORNE... DRUSILLA COULD NEVER DESTROY THAT...
YOU ARE MY KHAT, AND I AM YOUR GUARDIAN.

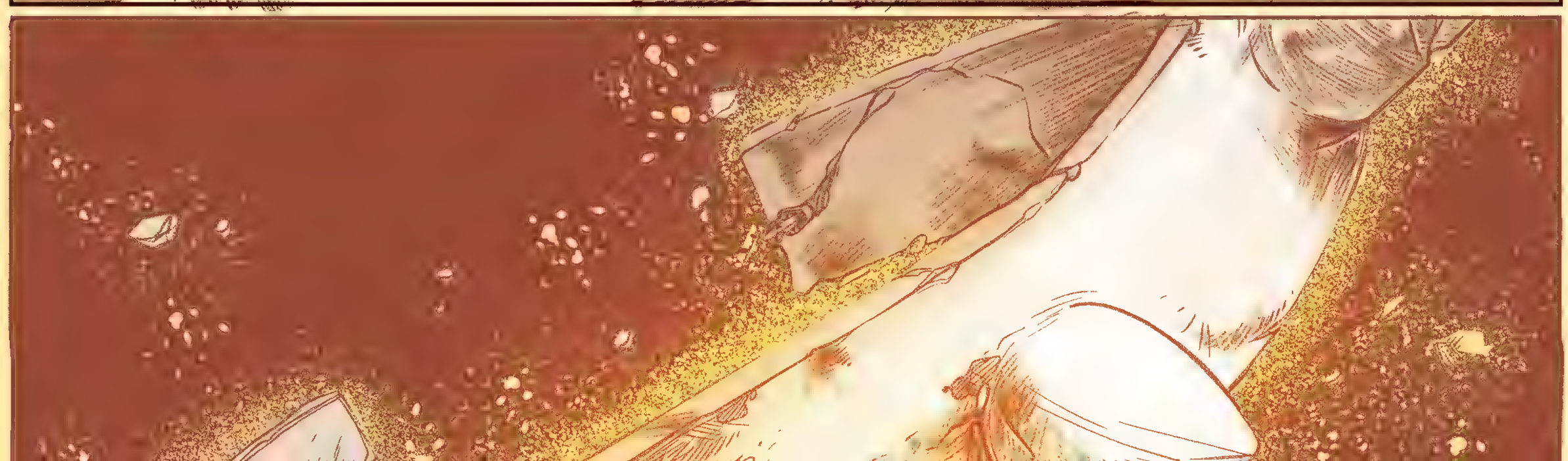
WE WILL ALWAYS BE A PART OF EACH OTHER.
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?! KILL HER!
I WAS MADE FOR YOU AND YOU WERE MADE FOR ME. WE ARE TWO HALVES OF THE SAME SOUL. DESTINED TO BE TOGETHER.
I. SAID. KILL. HER!

AHHHH
OW!
ROSE...I...CAN'T... PLEASE...HELP ME... THE THINGS SHE HAS MADE ME DO...
IT'S OKAY. I FORGIVE YOU.

I LOVE YOU.

UUUGHHH.
ROSE.


CLANG



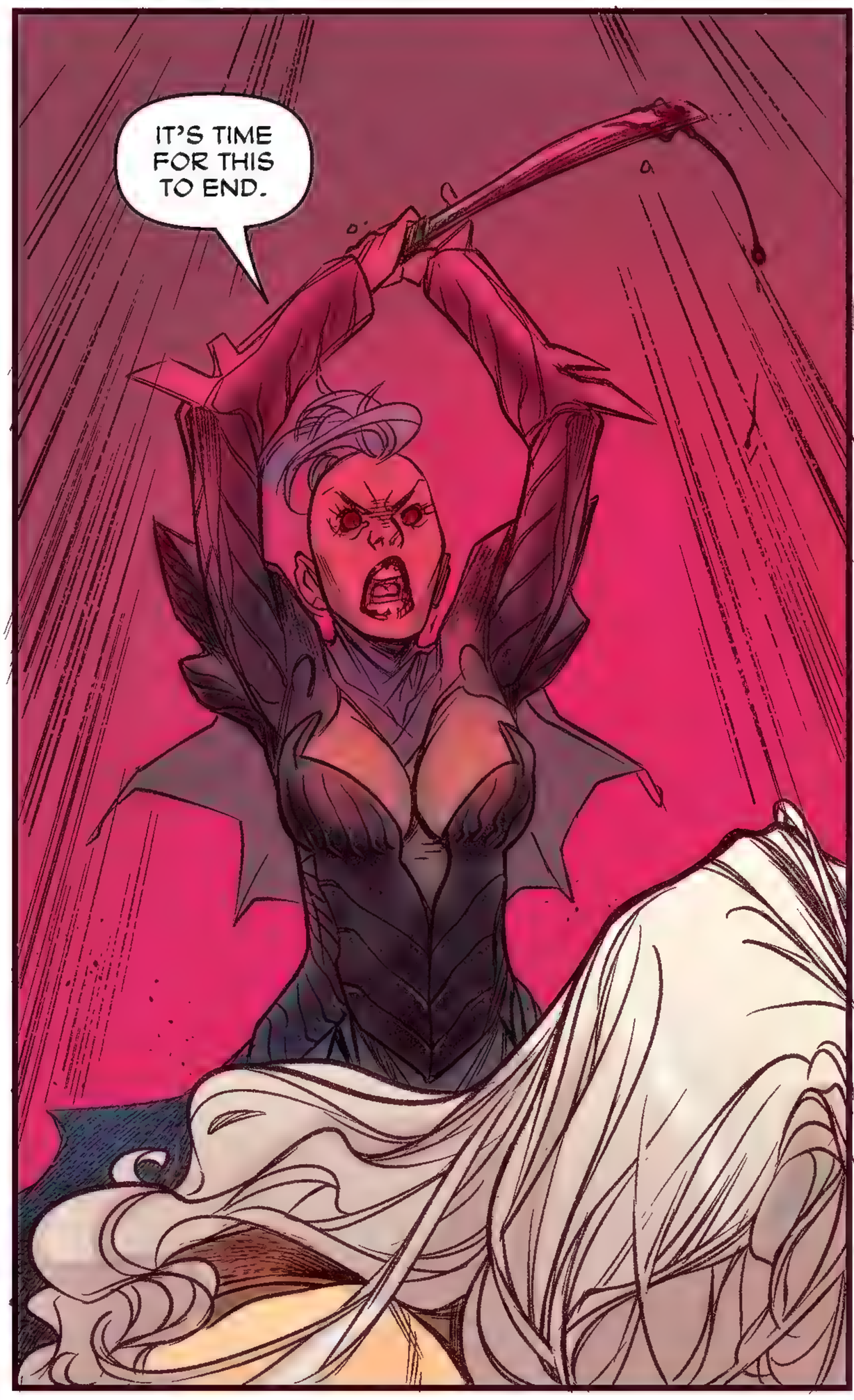
THE REBEL CAMP.
ILA, I FOUND IT! MOTHER'S CURE FOR THE PLAGUE--
SICK.

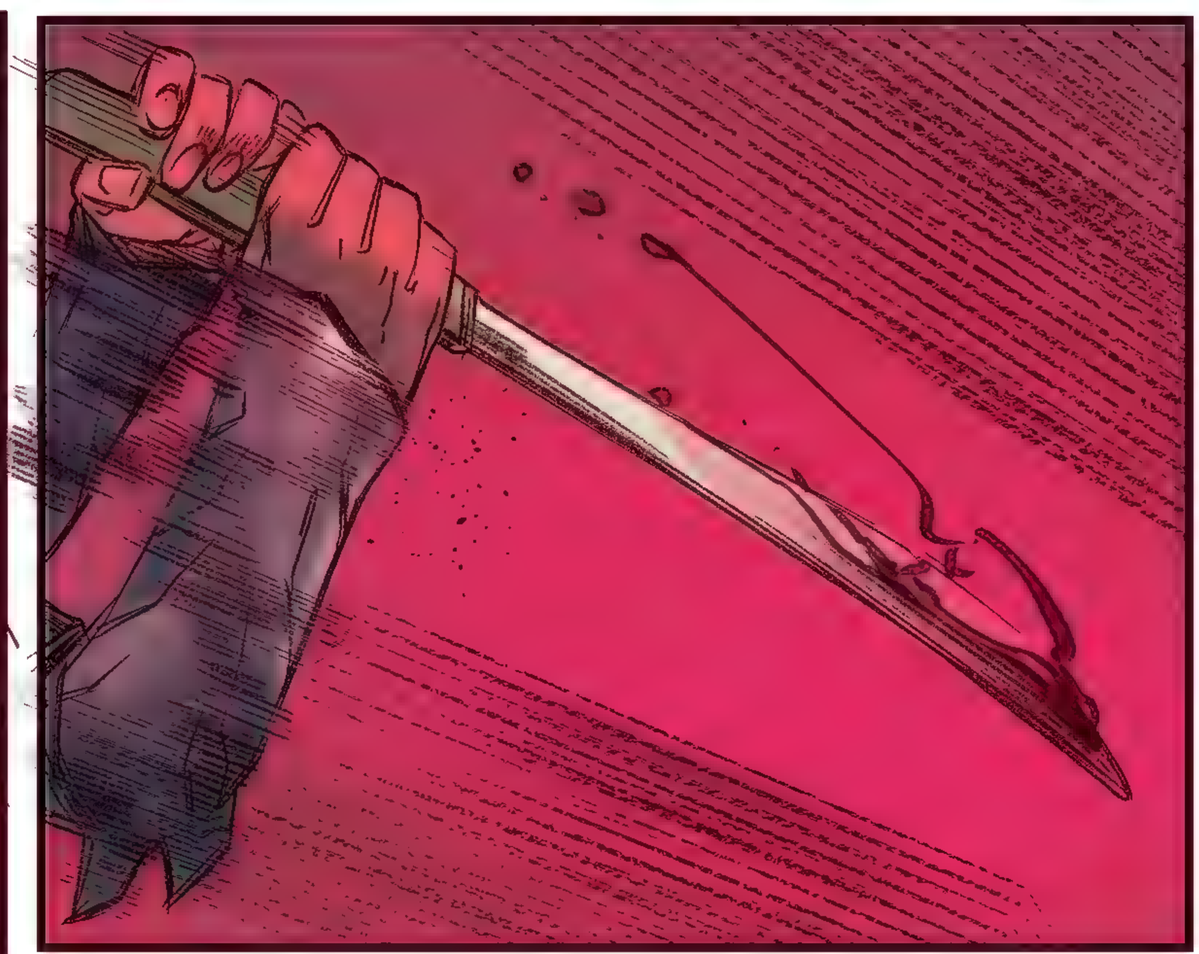
DON'T WORRY, ILA. EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE OKAY NOW.
I HOPE.

SORRY. I'M SO SORRY, LITTLE ONE. I ALMOST...
THORNE, PLEASE. STOP. THERE IS ***NOTHING*** YOU COULD DO THAT WOULD MAKE ME STOP LOVING YOU!

THANK YOU. THANK YOU FOR SAVING M--
≥MMMPFF≤
THORNE...WHAT'S WRONG...WHAT'S HAPPENING≥!
YOU WANTED HIM SO BADLY, GUARDIAN, NOW YOU CAN WATCH HIM DIE.

NOOOOOOOO!!!!
SOB
THORNE...
PLEASE...
WAKE UP...
SOB


IT'S TIME FOR THIS TO END.



CLANG

I COULDN'T AGREE MORE.

SEVENTEEN

THE CHAMBER OF THE FALLEN
IT IS TIME, MY BROTHERS.
COME.

DROP YOUR WEAPON AND SURRENDER TO YOUR FATE, HUMAN. YOU CANNOT POSSIBLY HOPE TO STAND AGAINST THE MIGHT OF A SERVANT OF BALOR.
BALOR?
YOUR SISTER HAS PREPARED THE WAY FOR OUR MASTER TO RISE.
DRUCILLA WILL TAKE HER PLACE AT BALOR'S SIDE. BUT, IT IS NOT TOO LATE FOR YOU TO JOIN HER.
IMAGINE THE POWER. TOGETHER YOU WILL RULE. YOU WILL MAKE TTEREVE GREAT AGAIN.

YOU ALREADY KNOW IN YOUR HEART THAT YOU CANNOT WIN THIS WAR.
THE ONLY QUESTION IS, HOW LONG WILL YOU WATCH YOUR PEOPLE SUFFER, PRINCE FELIX?
LET THE MASTER SAVE YOU FROM YOURSELVES.
ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS SURRENDER.

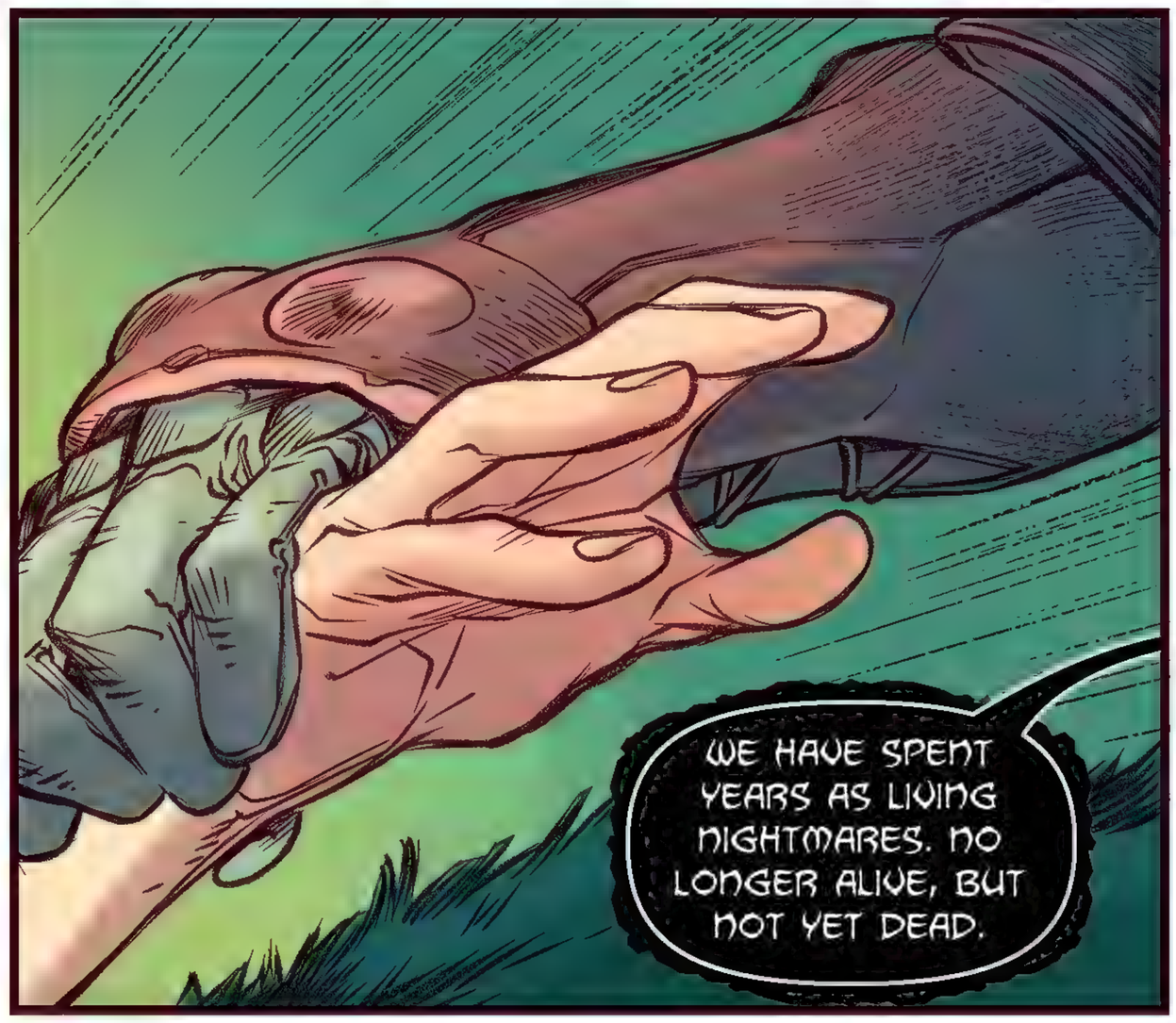
I'VE TOSSED YOU ASIDE ONCE TODAY, SIMON. DO YOU HATE YOURSELF SO MUCH THAT YOU WOULD SEEK TO REPEAT THE EXPERIENCE?
NOT AS MUCH AS I HATE WHAT YOU HAVE BECOME.
BECAUSE YOU ARE *WEAK!* THE WEAK WILL ALWAYS RESENT THOSE WHO HAVE THE STRENGTH TO DO WHAT THEY CANNOT.
YOU WANT STRENGTH?! I'LL GIVE YOU *STRENGTH!*
DON'T YOU DARE DO IT, THORNE! DON'T YOU EVEN *THINK* OF LEAVING ME AGAIN!

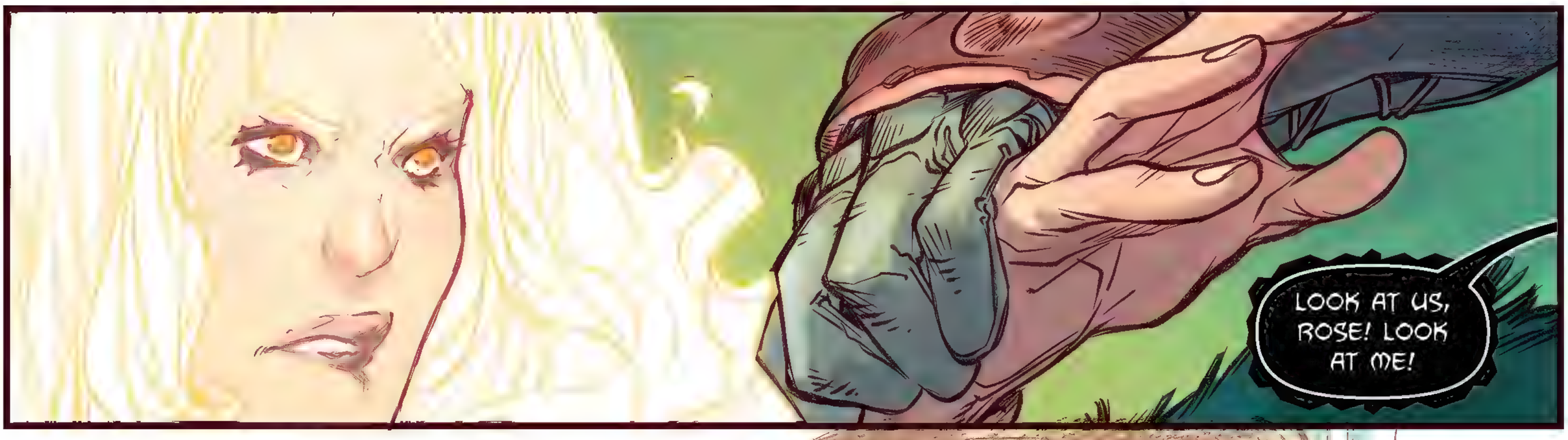
THORNE?!
THORNE!!
DON'T WORRY, THORNE. I'M GOING TO FIX IT. I'LL BRING YOU BACK!
BUT AT WHAT COST, GUARDIAN?
WOULD YOU MAKE HIM ONE OF US?
ALWAYS DYING, NEVER DEAD?

GET AWAY FROM HIM!
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SACRIFICE, MY FRIEND.
OUR BROTHER'S DEATH, THORNE'S DEATH, BEGAN THE MOMENT HE TOOK THE LIFE OF AN INNOCENT.
SHE TAUGHT US THAT.
KHATZ ARE TIED MORE CLOSELY TO THE LAND THAN EVEN THEIR GUARDIANS. THEY ARE BORN TO BE ITS PROTECTORS. WHEN THEY BREAK THAT COVENANT...

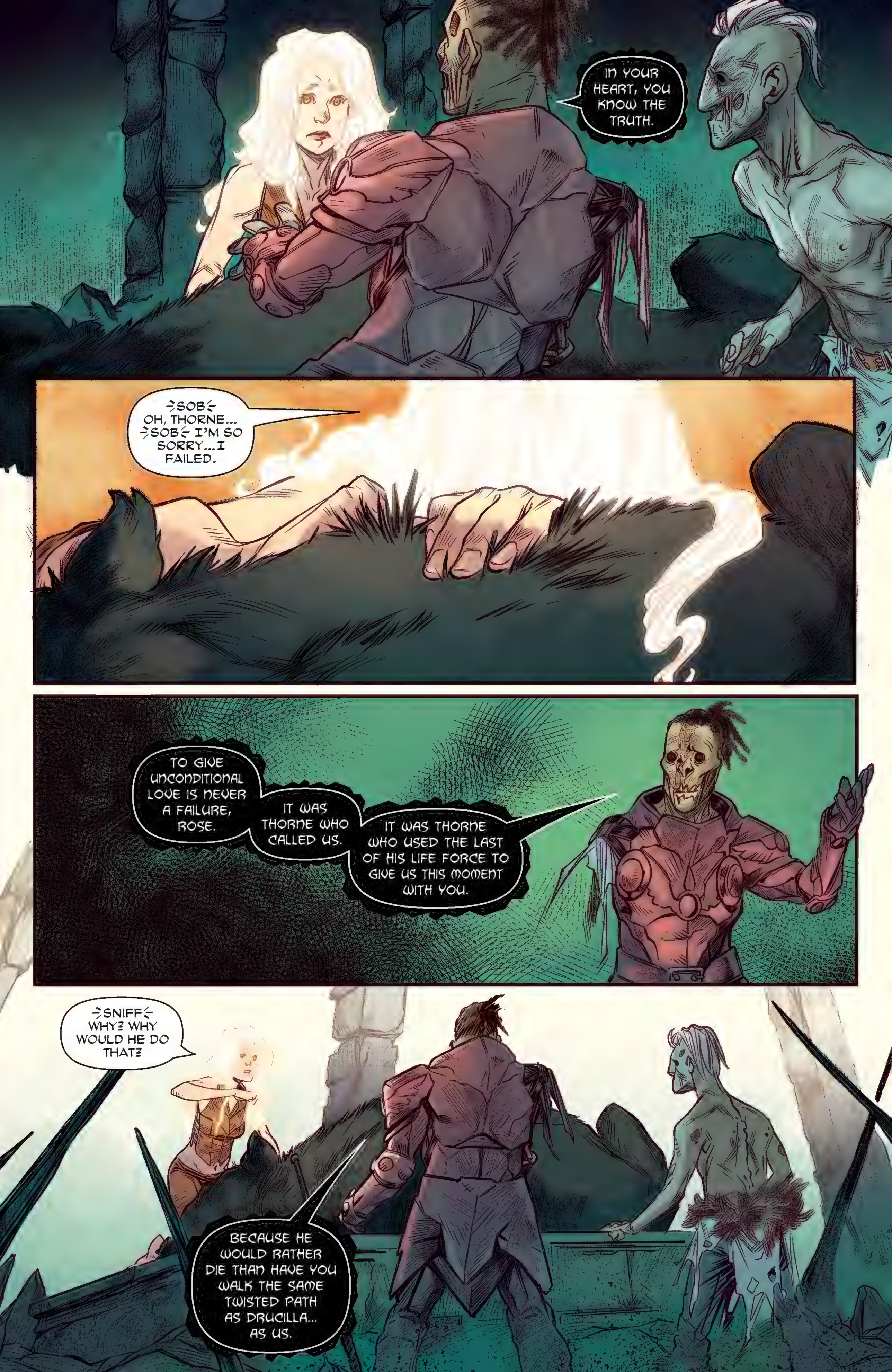
BUT IT WASN'T HIS FAULT. *SHE* MADE HIM DO IT!

NO! THIS IS JUST ANOTHER ONE OF DRUCILLA'S TRICKS! YOU'RE TRYING TO MAKE SURE I DON'T SAVE HIM!


WE HAVE SPENT YEARS AS LIVING NIGHTMARES. NO LONGER ALIVE, BUT NOT YET DEAD.

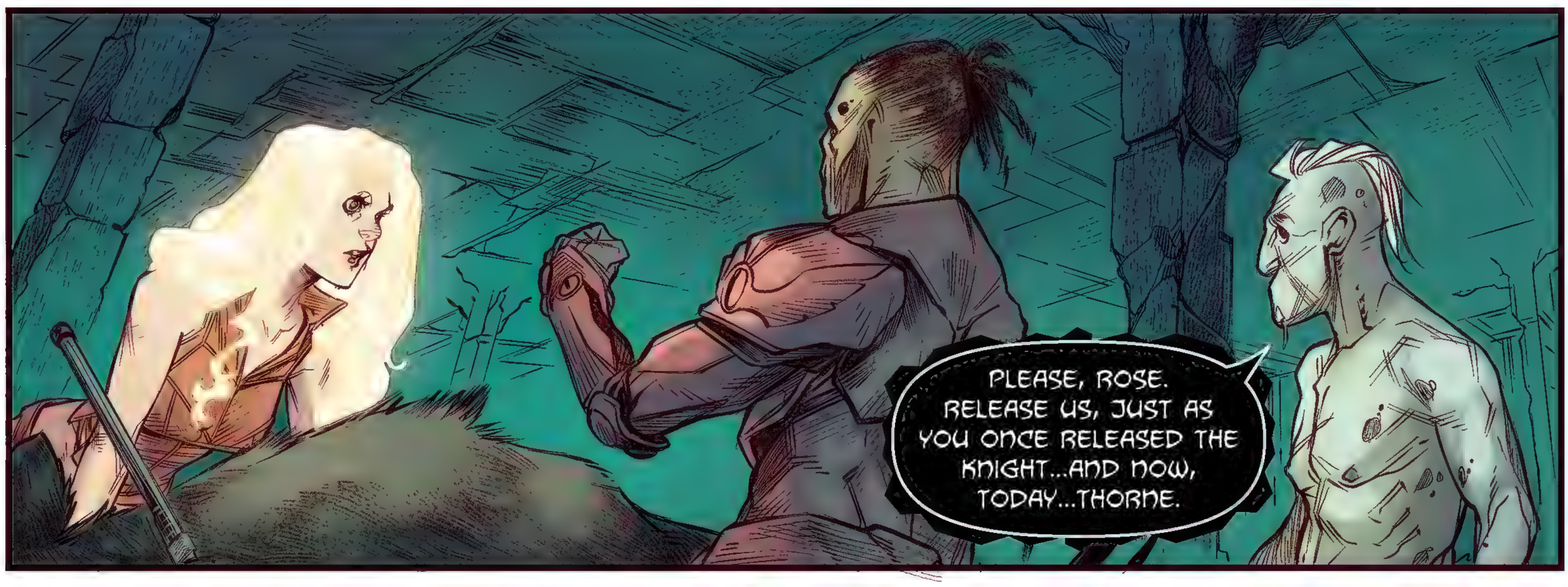

LOOK AT US, ROSE! LOOK AT ME!

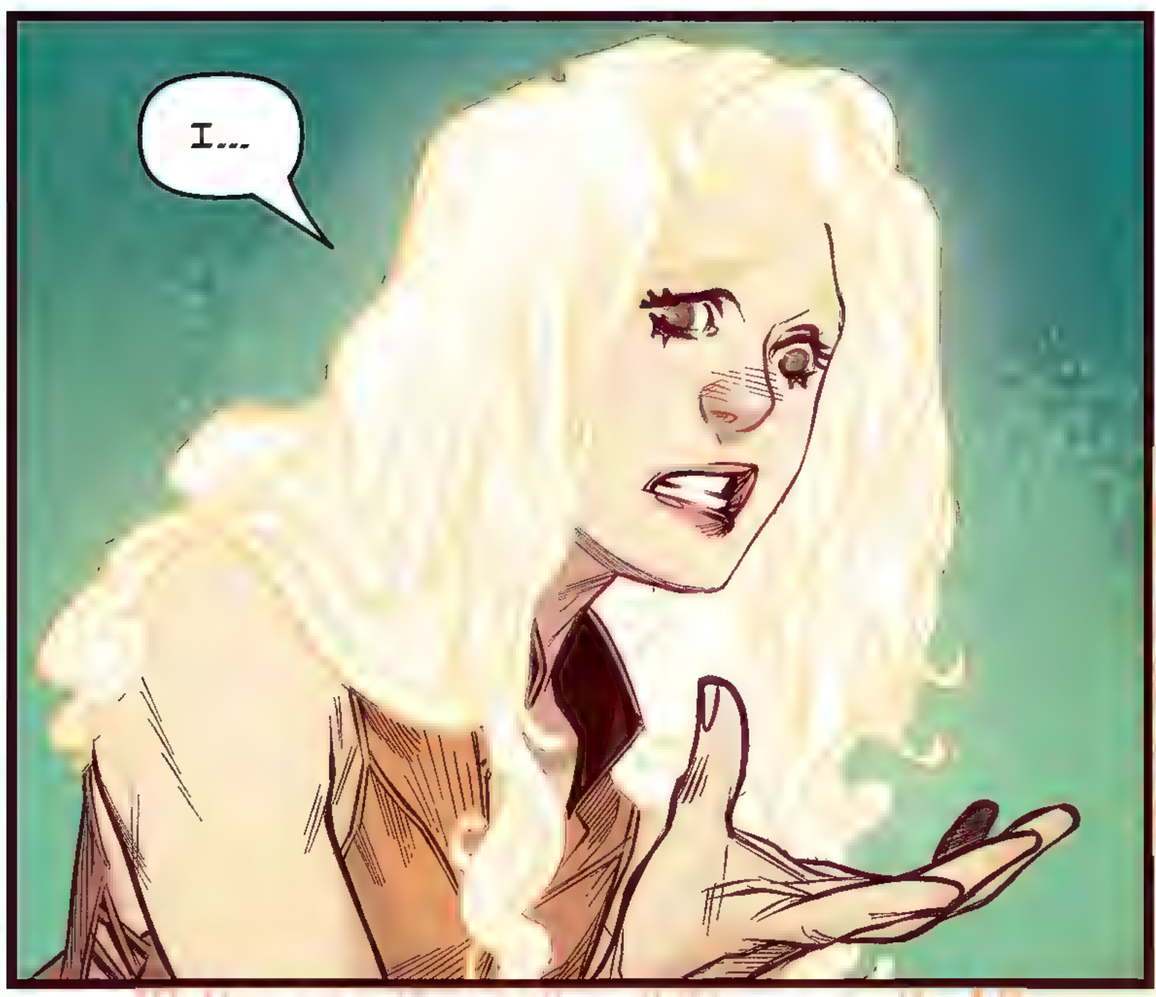
IS THIS WHAT YOU WANT FOR THORNE? BECAUSE *THIS* IS WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU USE YOUR POWER TO BRING HIM BACK.

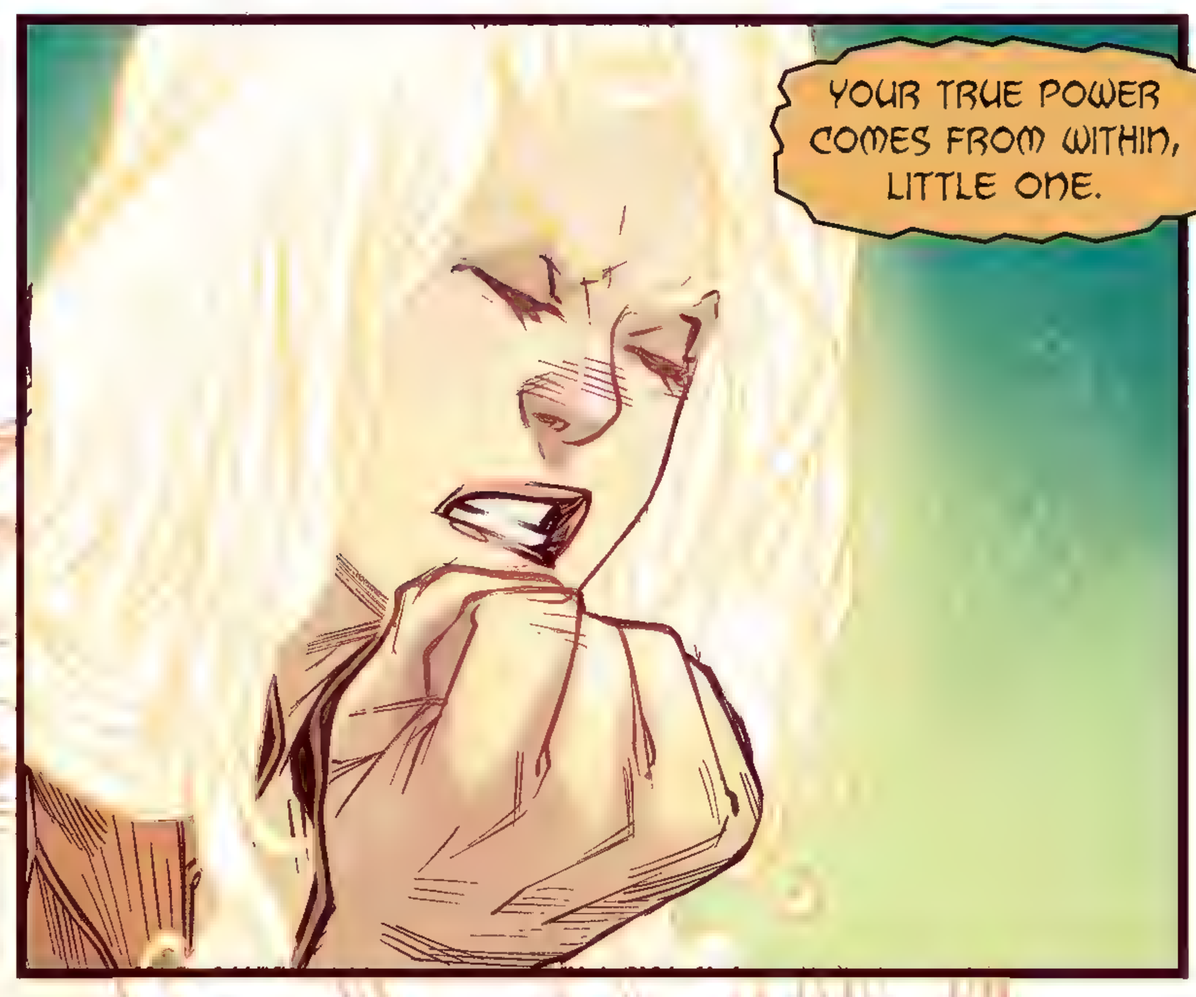

IN YOUR HEART, YOU KNOW THE TRUTH.
SOB OH, THORNE... SOB I'M SO SORRY...I FAILED.
TO GIVE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE IS NEVER A FAILURE, ROSE.
IT WAS THORNE WHO CALLED US.
IT WAS THORNE WHO USED THE LAST OF HIS LIFE FORCE TO GIVE US THIS MOMENT WITH YOU.
SNIFF WHY? WHY WOULD HE DO THAT?
BECAUSE HE WOULD RATHER DIE THAN HAVE YOU WALK THE SAME TWISTED PATH AS DRUCILLA... AS US.

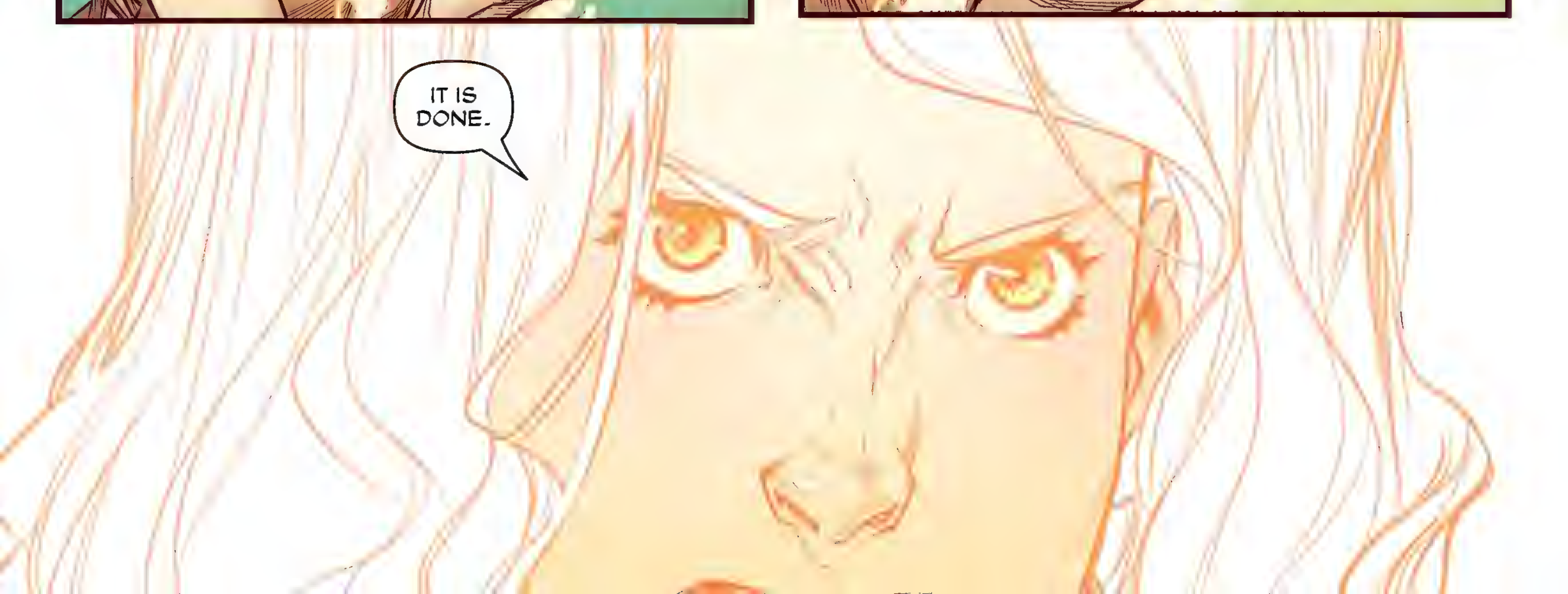
THE ROLE OF THE GUARDIANS WAS TO EXEMPLIFY VIRTUES, BUT IN OUR PRIDE...

OUR ARROGANCE... WE BECAME CORRUPTIBLE... WEAK. THAT IS HOW OUR CHAINS WERE FORGED.
BUT YOU BROKE YOUR CHAINS; YOU STAYED TRUE TO THE PATH OF THE GUARDIANS. YOU KNEW WHAT WE HAD FORGOTTEN.

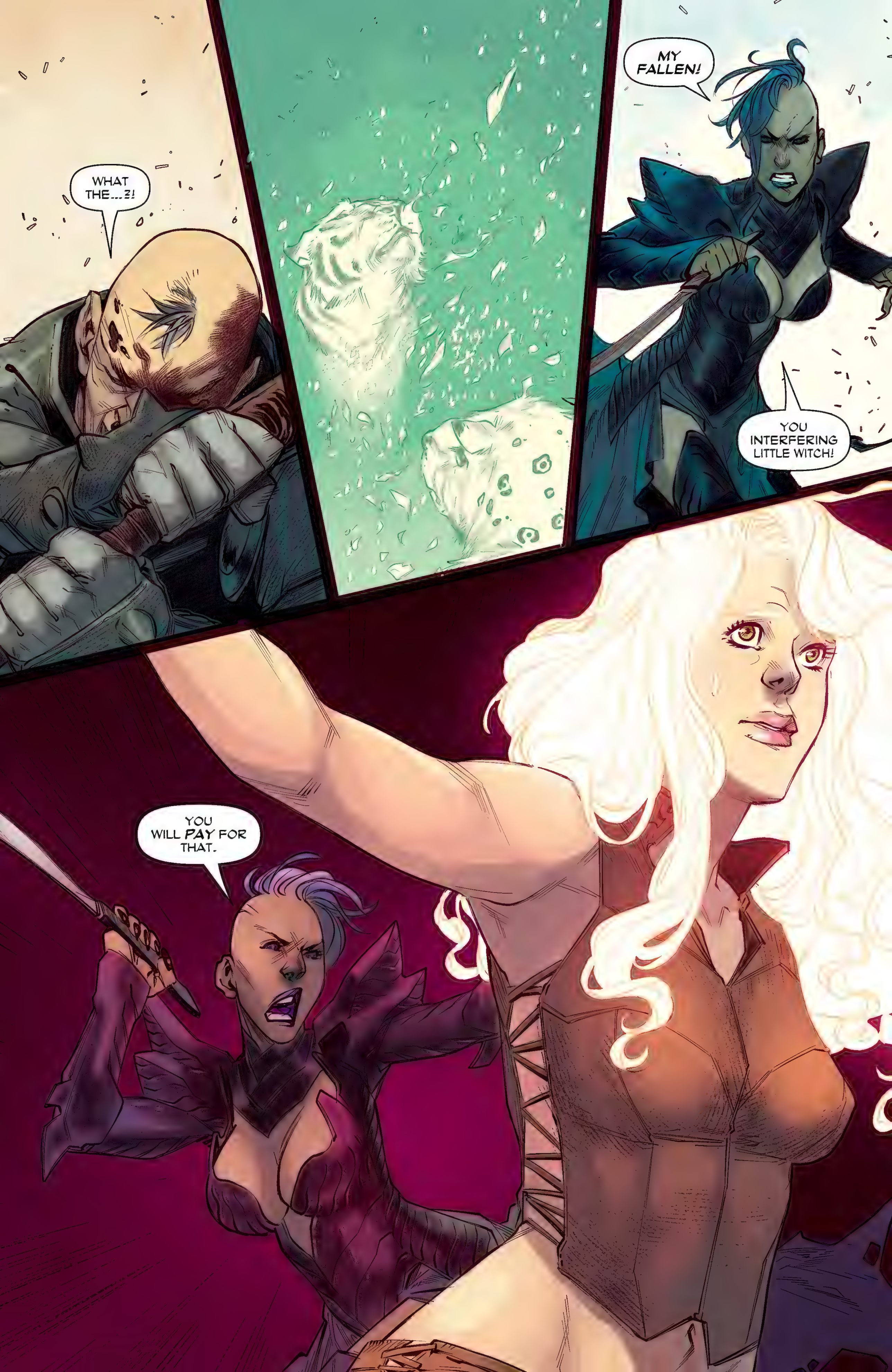

PLEASE, ROSE. RELEASE US, JUST AS YOU ONCE RELEASED THE KNIGHT...AND NOW, TODAY...THORNE.


I...


YOUR TRUE POWER COMES FROM WITHIN, LITTLE ONE.


IT IS DONE.

YOU. ARE. FORGIVEN!


WHAT THE...?!
MY FALLEN!
YOU INTERFERING LITTLE WITCH!
YOU WILL PAY FOR THAT.

THE TIME OF KINGS AND GUARDIANS IS OVER.
THE TIME OF BALOR IS--
RUMBLE
NO! IT CAN'T---
THE TIME OF BALOR IS NEVER!

IT IS YOU WHO SHOULD BE AFRAID, DEMON. YOUR MASTER FIGHTS WITH LIES. I FIGHT FOR TRUTH!
YOUR MASTER IS THE LORD OF CHAOS...
...BUT I FIGHT FOR FAITH AND HOPE AND LOVE!
THIS KINGDOM WILL NEVER BELONG TO BALOR!
AWCK!
YOU'RE NOT GETTING AWAY THAT EASILY, DEMON!

I WILL CARVE YOUR MISERABLE LITTLE HEART INTO PIECES--
GRRRRRRAHHHH!
YES! DO IT, SIMON! FEEL THE RUSH OF POWER, THE TICKLE IN YOUR BELLY TELLING YOU TO SQUEEZE. GIVE IN TO THE DARKNESS.
WE ARE TWO OF A KIND, YOU AND I. TWO TWISTED SOULS... DESTINED FOR ONE ANOTHER.
NO! YOU'RE A MONSTER! YOU HATE EVERYTHING IN THIS WORLD, BUT NOTHING MORE THAN YOURSELF!

LIKE I SAID...TWO OF A KIND.
YOU'RE FOOLING YOURSELF IF YOU THINK THAT MILKSOP COULD EVER HAVE FEELINGS FOR SOMEONE LIKE YOU.
AND YOU'RE FIGHTING AGAINST SOMETHING YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, DRUCILLA, BECAUSE IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT.
YOU'RE SCRABBLING TO FIND A VICTORY. TOO BLIND TO SEE THAT YOU'VE ALREADY LOST.
SIMON! DON'T. THIS ISN'T THE WAY!
LISTEN TO HER! EVEN NOW, AFTER ALL YOU HAVE DONE, STILL SHE BEGS FOR YOUR LIFE. BECAUSE THERE IS NO DARKNESS IN HER.

THAT'S WHY SHE HAS ME.
CORRECTION. THAT'S WHY SHE HAD YOU.
ARRGGGGHHH!
I WILL CRUSH EVERY SINGLE DROP OF LIFE FROM YOUR DISOBEDIENT SOUL...
...UNTIL ONLY THE FEAR REMAINS.
BOOM
LEAVE SIMON OUT OF THIS.
I THINK WE BOTH KNOW...THIS BATTLE WAS ALWAYS MINE TO FIGHT.

NO. ROSE. GET BEHIND--
YOU KNOW SHE'S RIGHT, SIMON. ONLY ROSE CAN END THIS.

YOU ARE GOING TO PAY FOR EVERYTHING YOU HAVE TAKEN FROM ME TODAY, GIRL.
THE FALLEN... THORNE, THEY WERE NEVER YOURS TO BEGIN WITH, DRUCILLA.
I MERELY SET THEM FREE.
I CAN DO THE SAME FOR YOU, DRUCILLA. IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR THAT LITTLE GIRL WHO CRAVED HER MOTHER'S LOVE.
THERE'S STILL TIME FOR HER TO TURN AWAY FROM THE DARKNESS, TO FREE HER HEART FROM ITS PRISON.

=HAHA= FREEDOM=!
TRUE FREEDOM ONLY COMES WHEN YOU HAVE THE POWER TO TAKE WHAT YOU WANT!
WHAT YOU DESERVE!
THEN I WILL GIVE YOU WHAT YOU DESERVE.
YOU HAVE NURTURED A DARKNESS IN YOUR SOUL THAT YOU HAVE SPREAD FAR BEYOND THESE CASTLE WALLS.

THE MORE CRUEL YOU HAVE BECOME... THE MORE YOU HAVE HATED...
...THE MORE YOU HAVE TRANSFORMED YOURSELF.
YOU HAVE BECOME A CREATURE OF MADNESS... HORROR...
ETERNALLY INSATIABLE AND UTTERLY ALONE.
YOU ARE A HELLISH CREATURE NOW, DRUCILLA. IT'S TIME YOU WENT HOME.*
*C.S. LEWIS

STUPID GIRL! YOU THINK YOU ARE THE FIRST PERSON TO TRY TO FORCE ME FROM MY HOME?!

MY FATHER DIED TRYING... AND SO WILL YOU!

YOU ARE NOT ALONE, ROSE.

TAKE STRENGTH FROM ME.

THROUGH ME...IN ME...YOU ARE CAPABLE OF INFINITELY MORE THAN YOU COULD ASK OR IMAGINE.

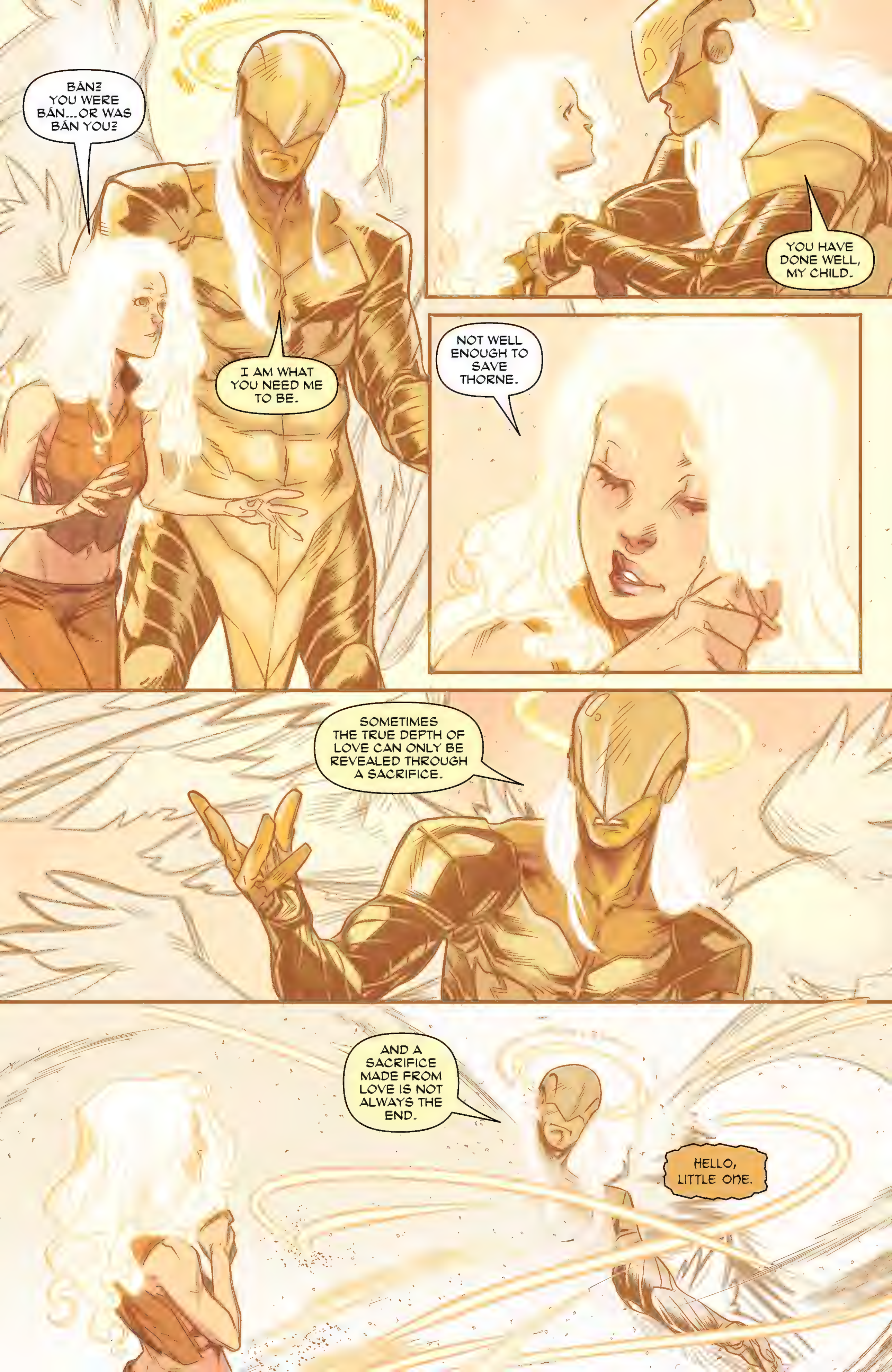
STOP! I'M THE QUEEN! THIS IS MY LAND!

TTEREVE IS MINE!!!

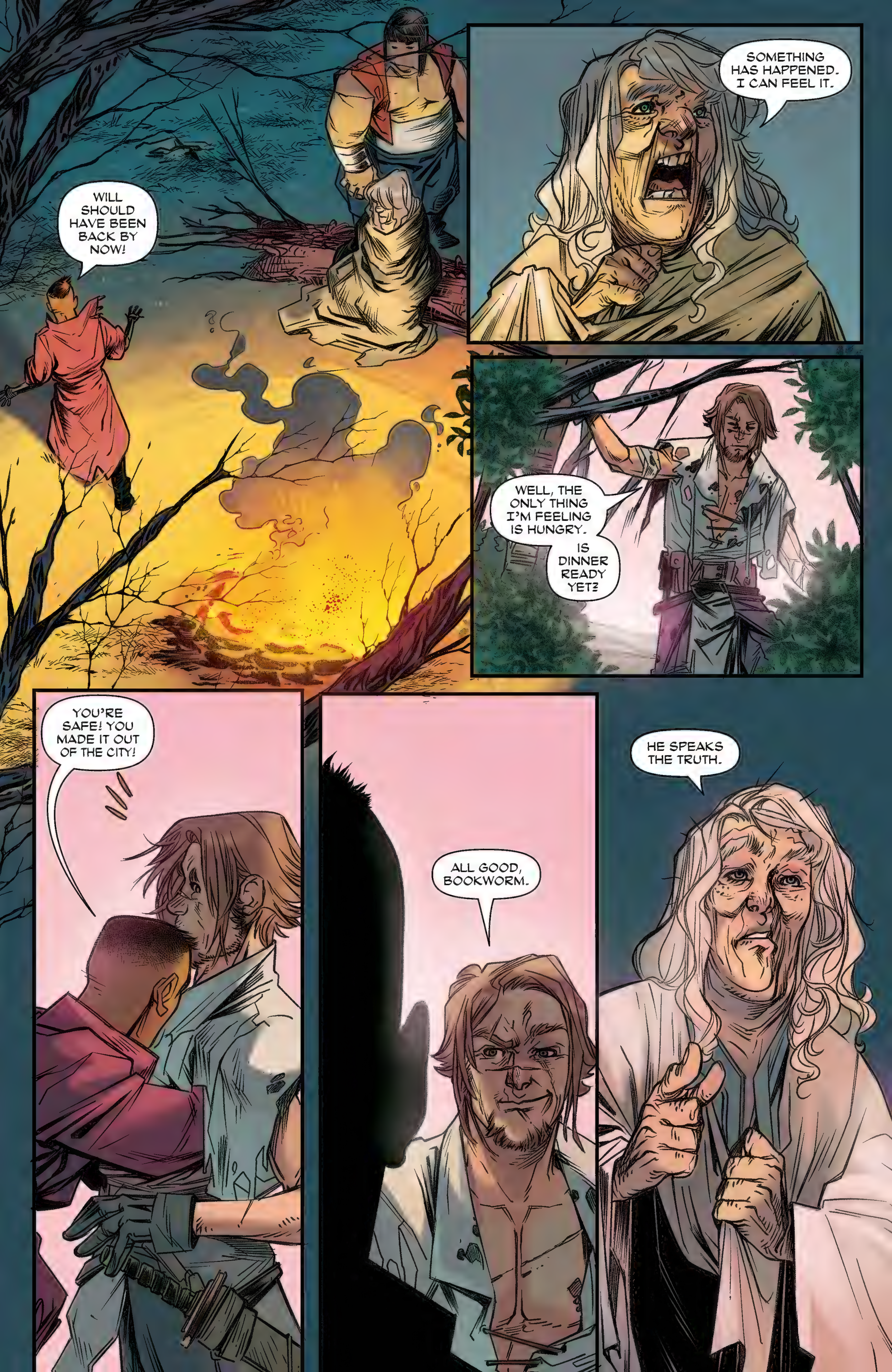
NO, DRUCILLA. TTEREVE BELONGS TO ITS PEOPLE.

YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS! I'LL MAKE YOU ALL PAY!!!

BOOM

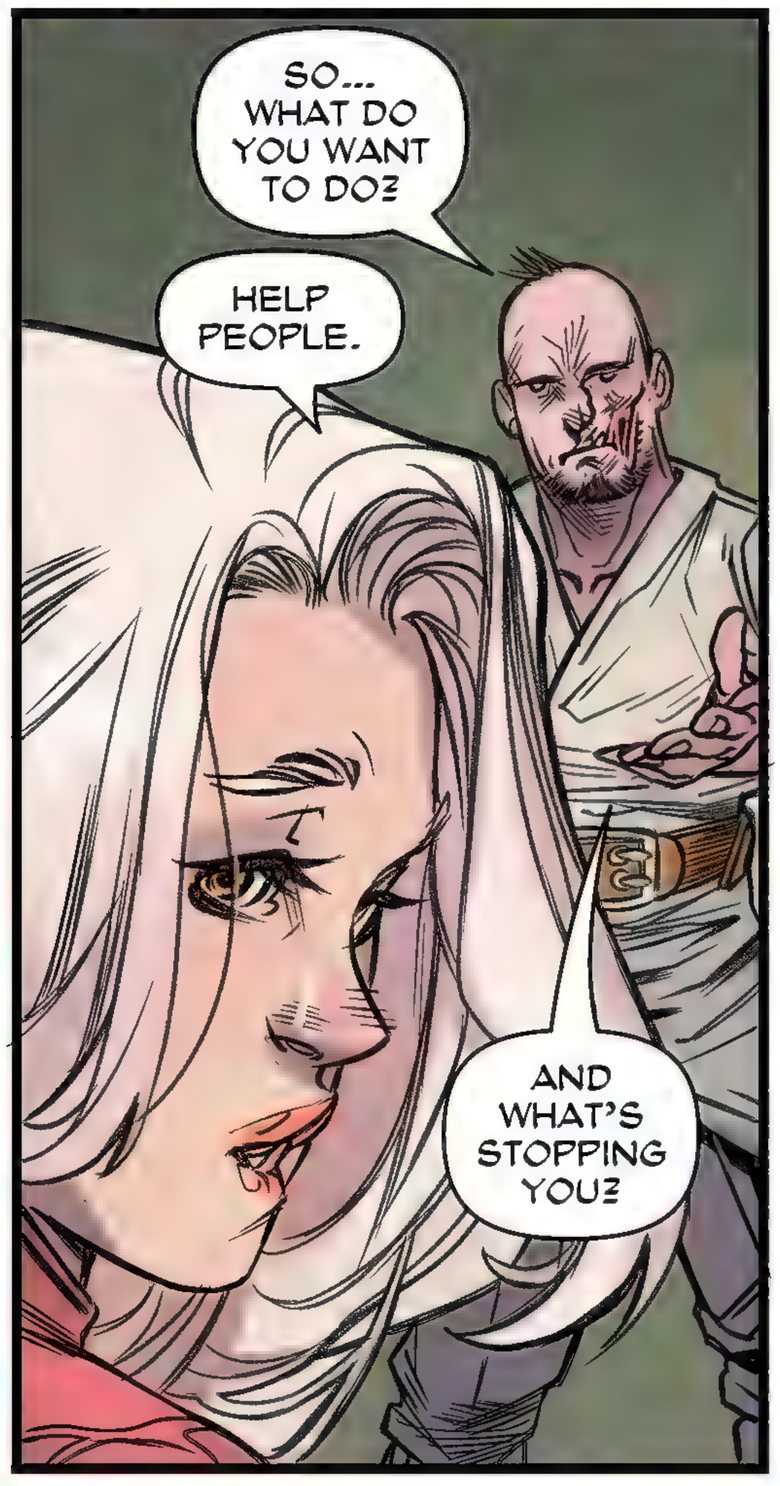

BÁN? YOU WERE BÁN...OR WAS BÁN YOU?
I AM WHAT YOU NEED ME TO BE.
YOU HAVE DONE WELL, MY CHILD.
NOT WELL ENOUGH TO SAVE THORNE.
SOMETIMES THE TRUE DEPTH OF LOVE CAN ONLY BE REVEALED THROUGH A SACRIFICE.
AND A SACRIFICE MADE FROM LOVE IS NOT ALWAYS THE END.
HELLO, LITTLE ONE.

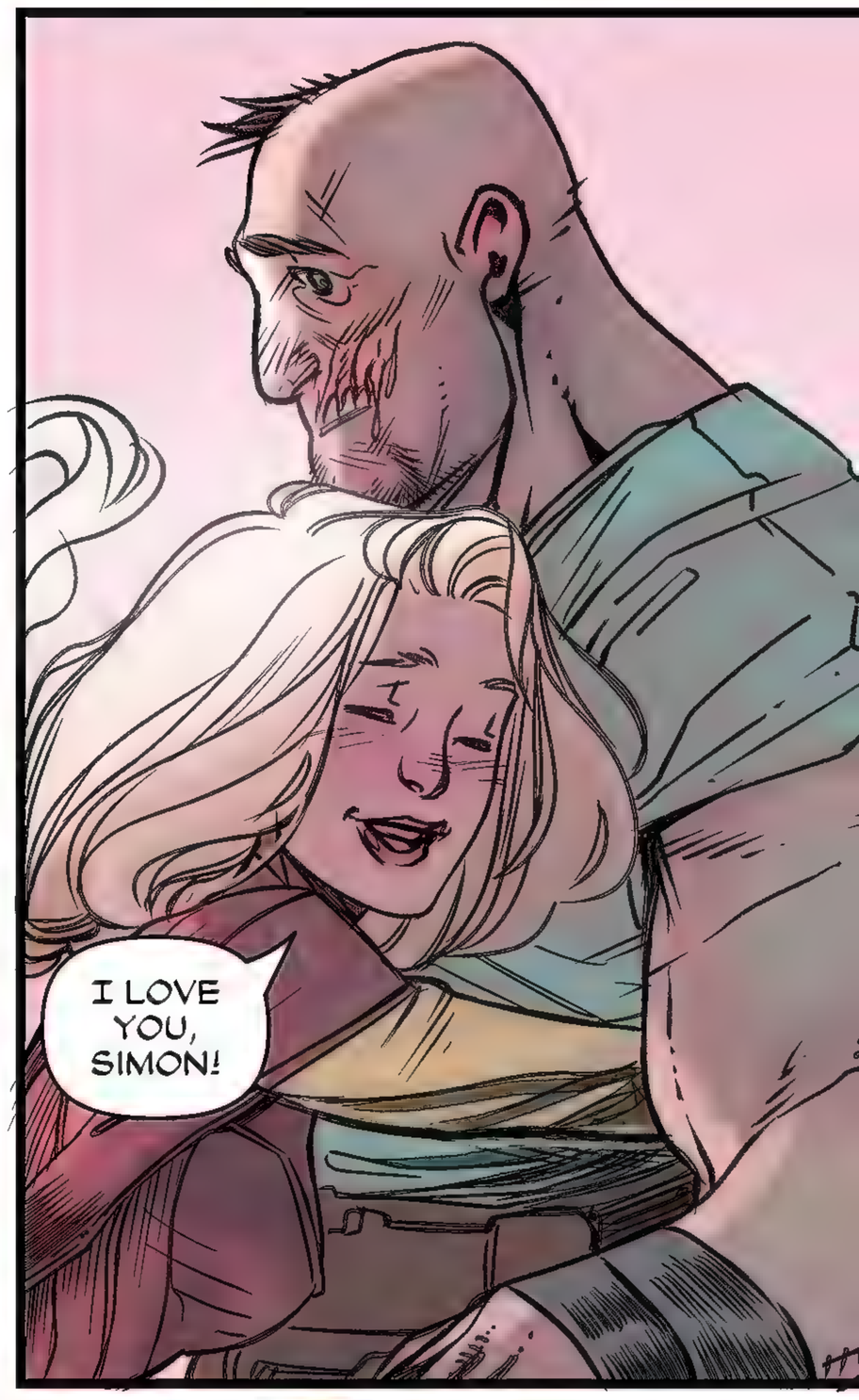
GOOD-BYE, SISTER. I'M SORRY IT HAD TO END THIS WAY.
PRINCE FELIX, I...
DON'T SAY ANYTHING, ROSE.
YOU DID WHAT YOU NEEDED TO DO TO SAVE OUR LAND FROM THE PLAGUE THAT MY SISTER HAD BECOME UPON IT.
BUT I WILL MISS THE GIRL SHE WAS ONCE, BEFORE HER DARKNESS CONSUMED HER.
THANK YOU. FOR HAVING THE COURAGE... THE STRENGTH TO SAVE TTEREVE.

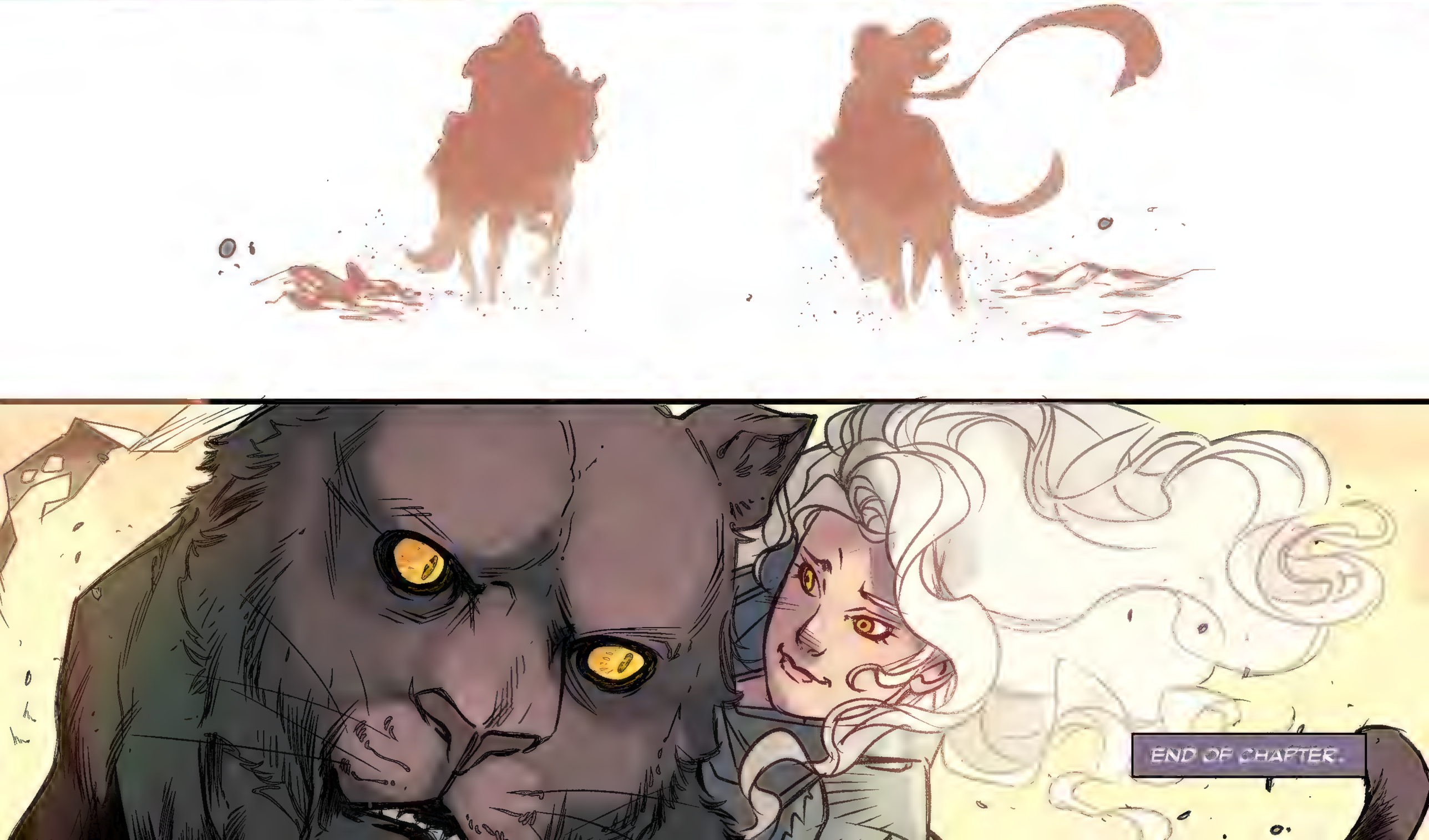

WILL SHOULD HAVE BEEN BACK BY NOW!
SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED. I CAN FEEL IT.
WELL, THE ONLY THING I'M FEELING IS HUNGRY.
IS DINNER READY YET?
YOU'RE SAFE! YOU MADE IT OUT OF THE CITY!
ALL GOOD, BOOKWORM.
HE SPEAKS THE TRUTH.

LOOK! ROSE HAS DONE IT.
WE'RE FREE!

WHAT'S WRONG?
I KNOW THIS IS JUST FELIX'S WAY OF THANKING ME...BUT...
IT'S STARTING TO FEEL LIKE I'M DOING MORE OF WHAT OTHER PEOPLE WANT AND LESS OF WHAT I WANT.


SO... WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?
HELP PEOPLE.
AND WHAT'S STOPPING YOU?


I LOVE YOU, SIMON!


END OF CHAPTER.

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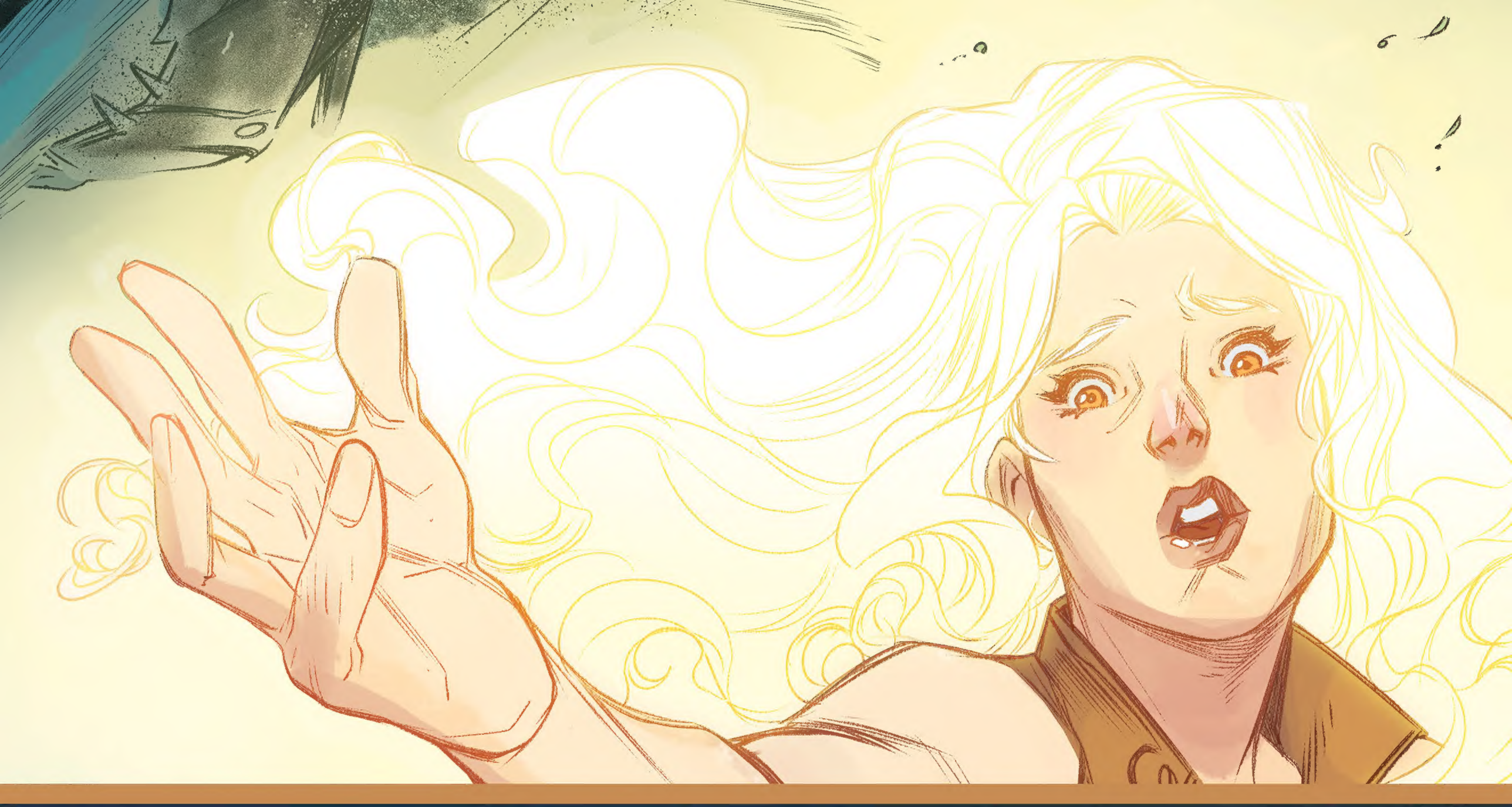

IN THE LAND OF TTEREVE, MAGIC IS A DEATH SENTENCE.

With Rose and Thorne in the clutches of the evil queen Drucilla, it's up to Felix and Sir Dante to hatch a daring plan to rescue the Guardian—before it's too late.

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